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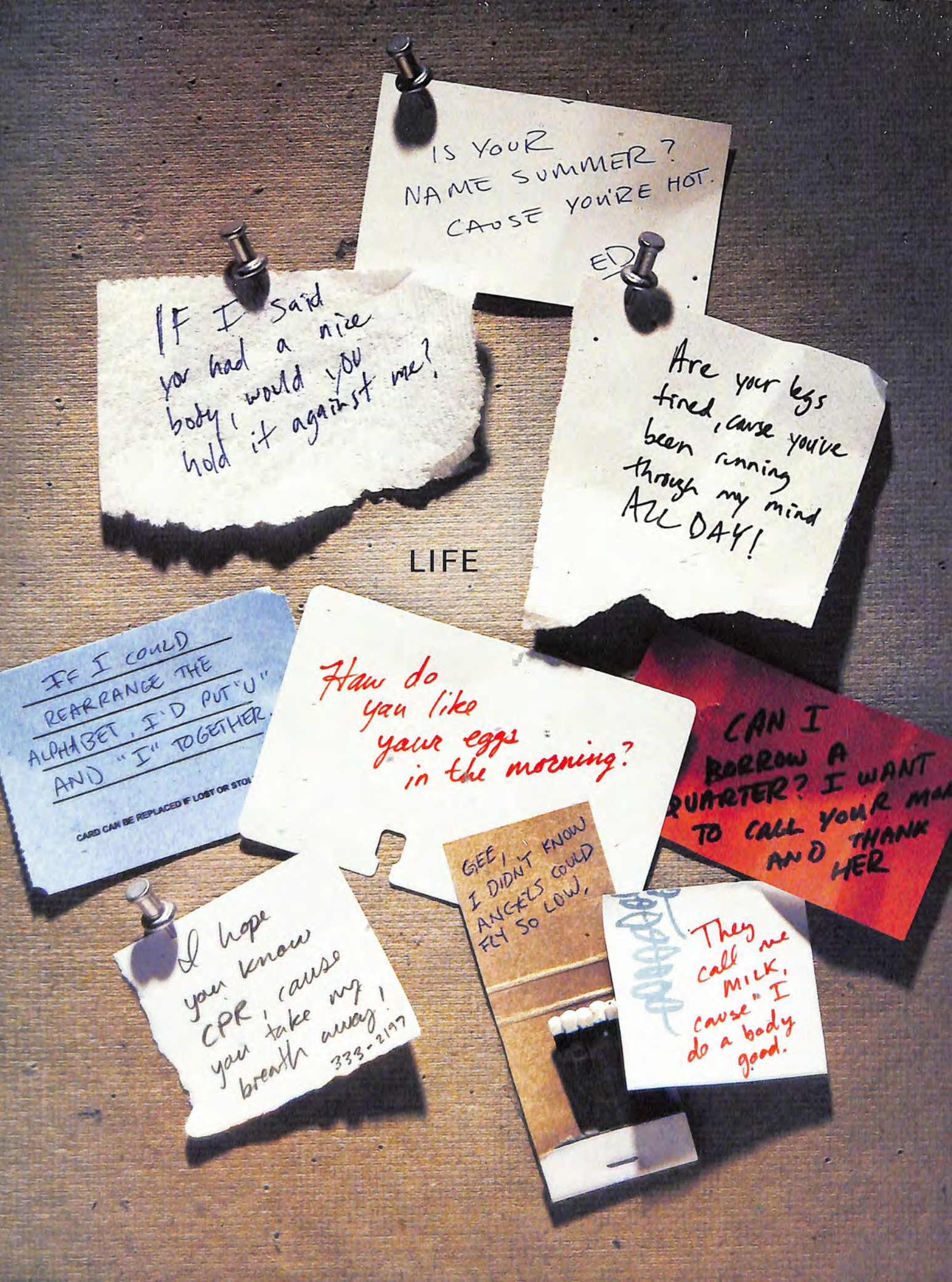
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IF I said you had a nice body, would you hold it against me?
Are your legs tired, cause you've been running through my mind ALL DAY!
LIFE
IF I COULD REARRANGE THE ALPHABET, I'D PUT "U" AND "I" TOGETHER.
CARD CAN BE REPLACED IF LOST OR STO
How do you like your eggs in the morning?
CAN I BORROW A QUARTER? I WANT TO CALL YOUR MA AND THANK HER
I hope you know CPR, cause you take my breath away! 333-2197
GEE, I DIDN'T KNOW ANGELS COULD FLY SO LOW,
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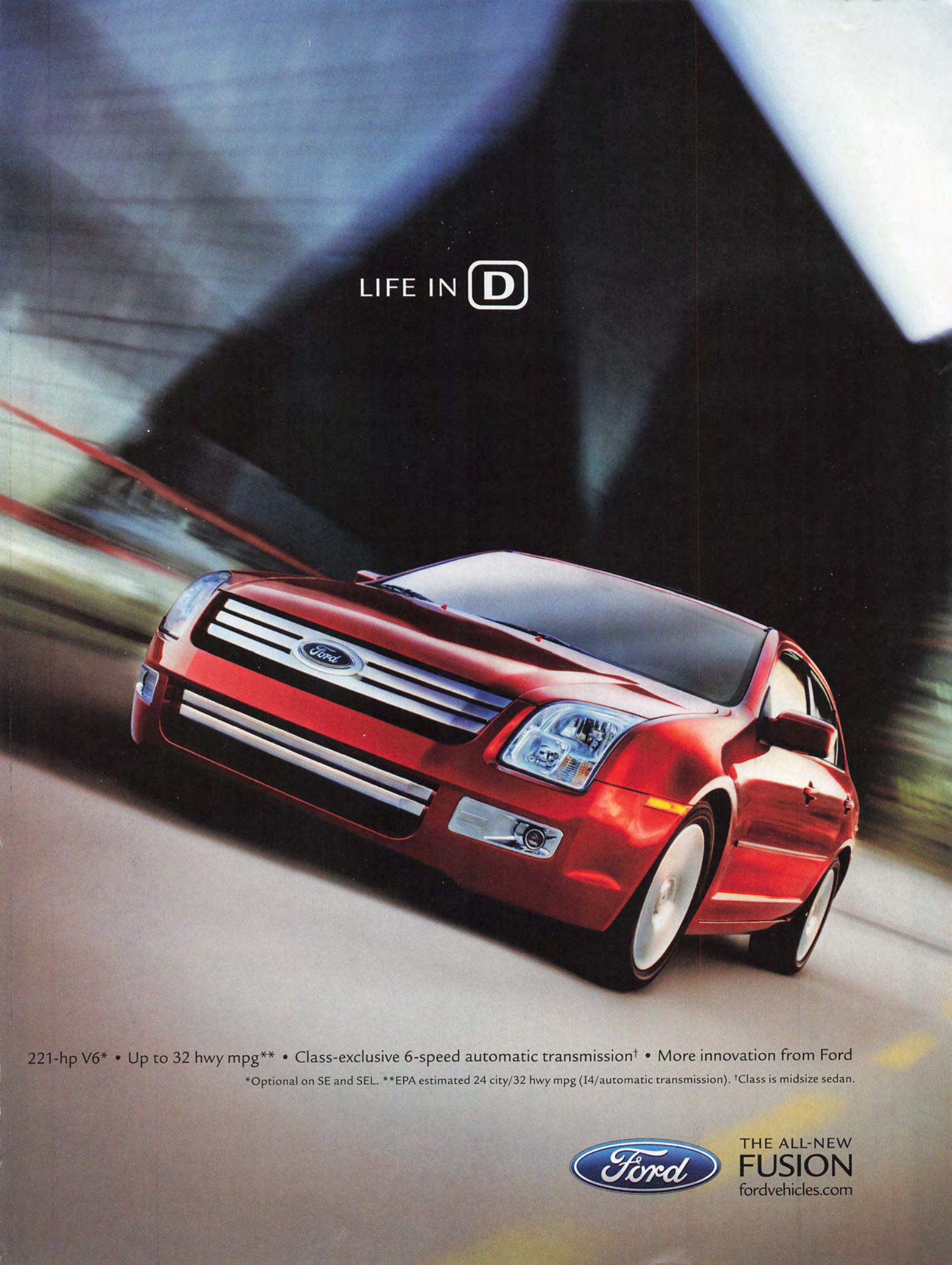

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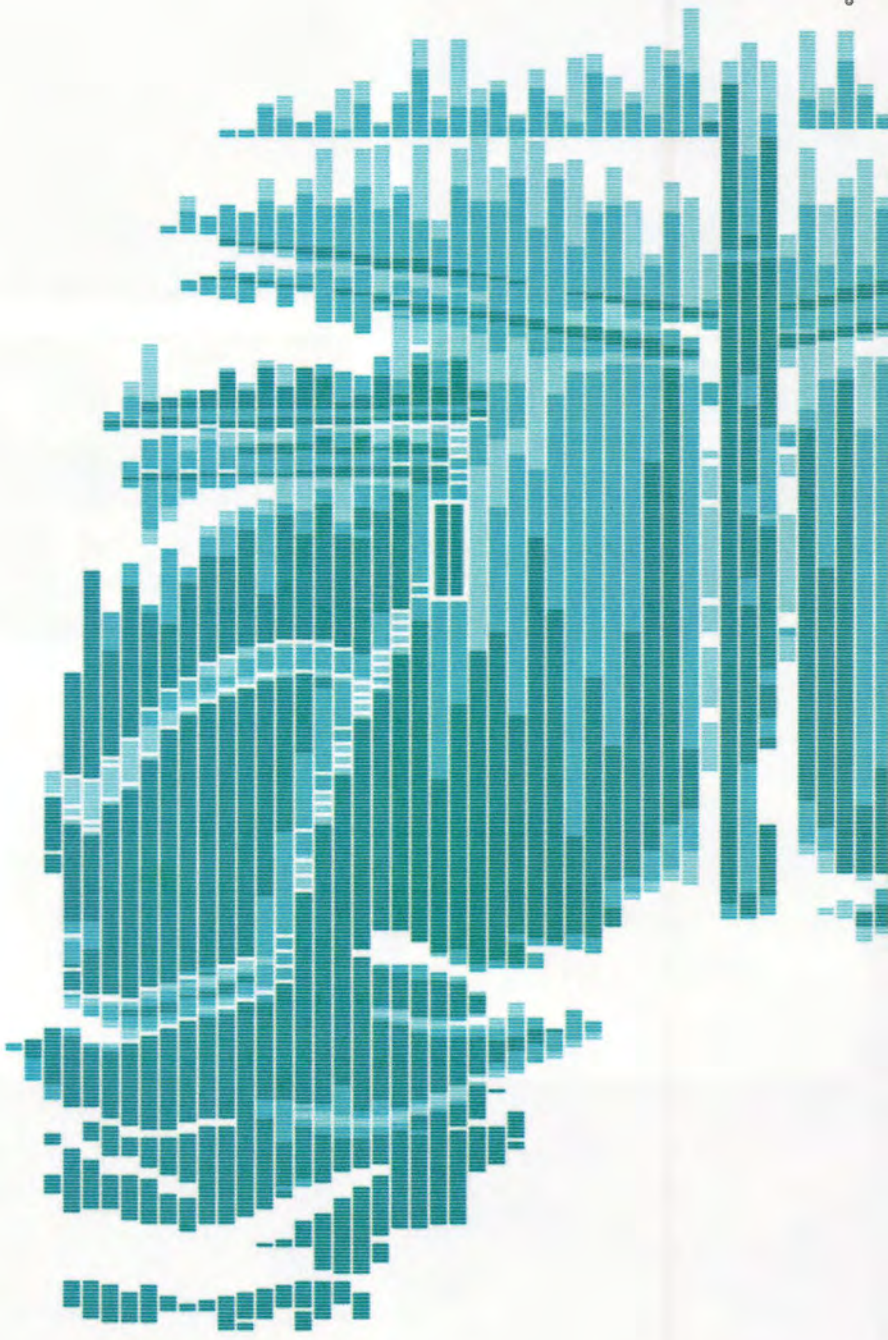

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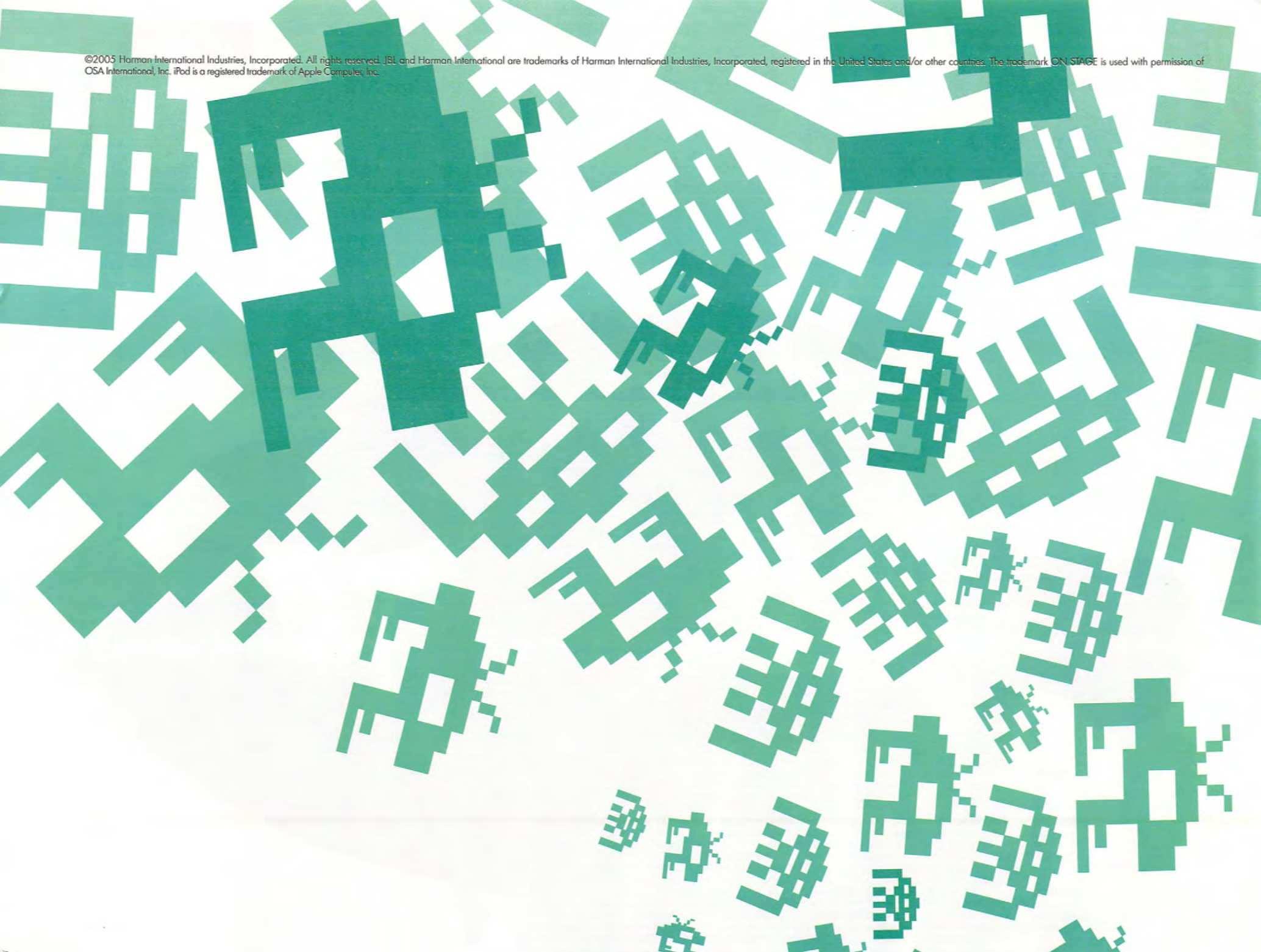

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BLENDER
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108 ASHLEE SIMPSON
Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Unless you're Ashlee Simpson and happen to have *Blender* tracking every second of your 21st birthday celebration!

118 KENNY CHESNEY
The country superstar has loads of cash, an idyllic Caribbean getaway and a tabloid divorce from an A-list starlet, but he really just wants one thing: to take the party into "sixth gear."

124 $848 WITH COHEED AND CAMBRIA
When *Blender* gave $848 to the mad geniuses behind prog-rock revivalists Coheed and Cambria, we expected them to do something ... really weird with it. Instead, they bought stuffed animals for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Awww!

128 FIONA APPLE
She was once the angry young woman of rock, but now an older, wiser—and calmer—Fiona Apple is ready to enjoy her life. And with the critically lauded, much-delayed *Extraordinary Machine* finally at a record store near you, she might actually be able to.

132 THE EMO-DRIVEN LIFE
Churches like Mars Hill in Seattle are quietly upending conventional notions of Christian rock by featuring devotional bands with an indie-rock sensibility—and the tattooed hipsters are turning up by the thousands.

ON THE COVER

ASHLEE SIMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANTHONY MANDLER

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"I FEEL LIKE I'VE COME INTO MY WOMANHOOD."
ASHLEE SIMPSON

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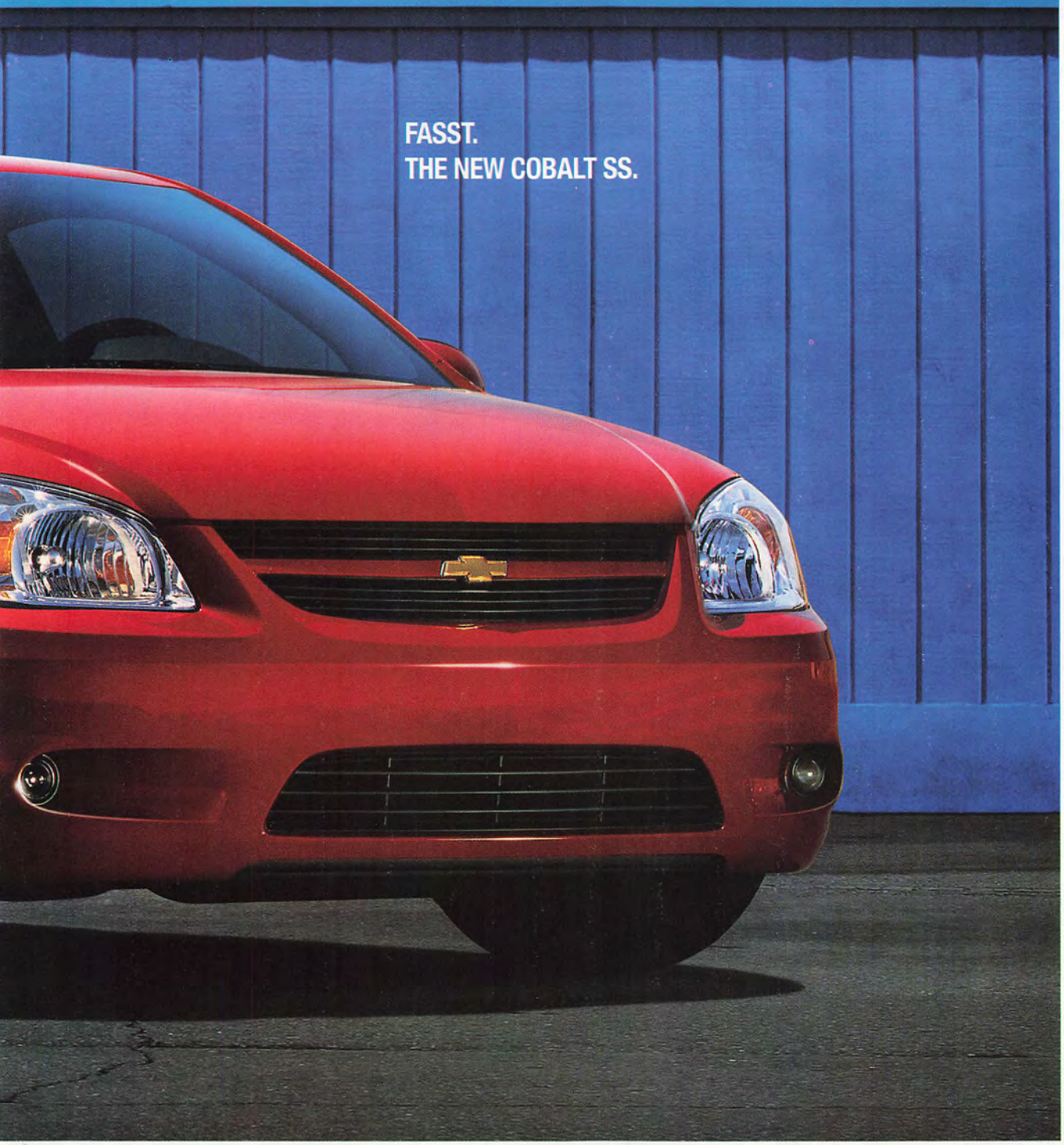

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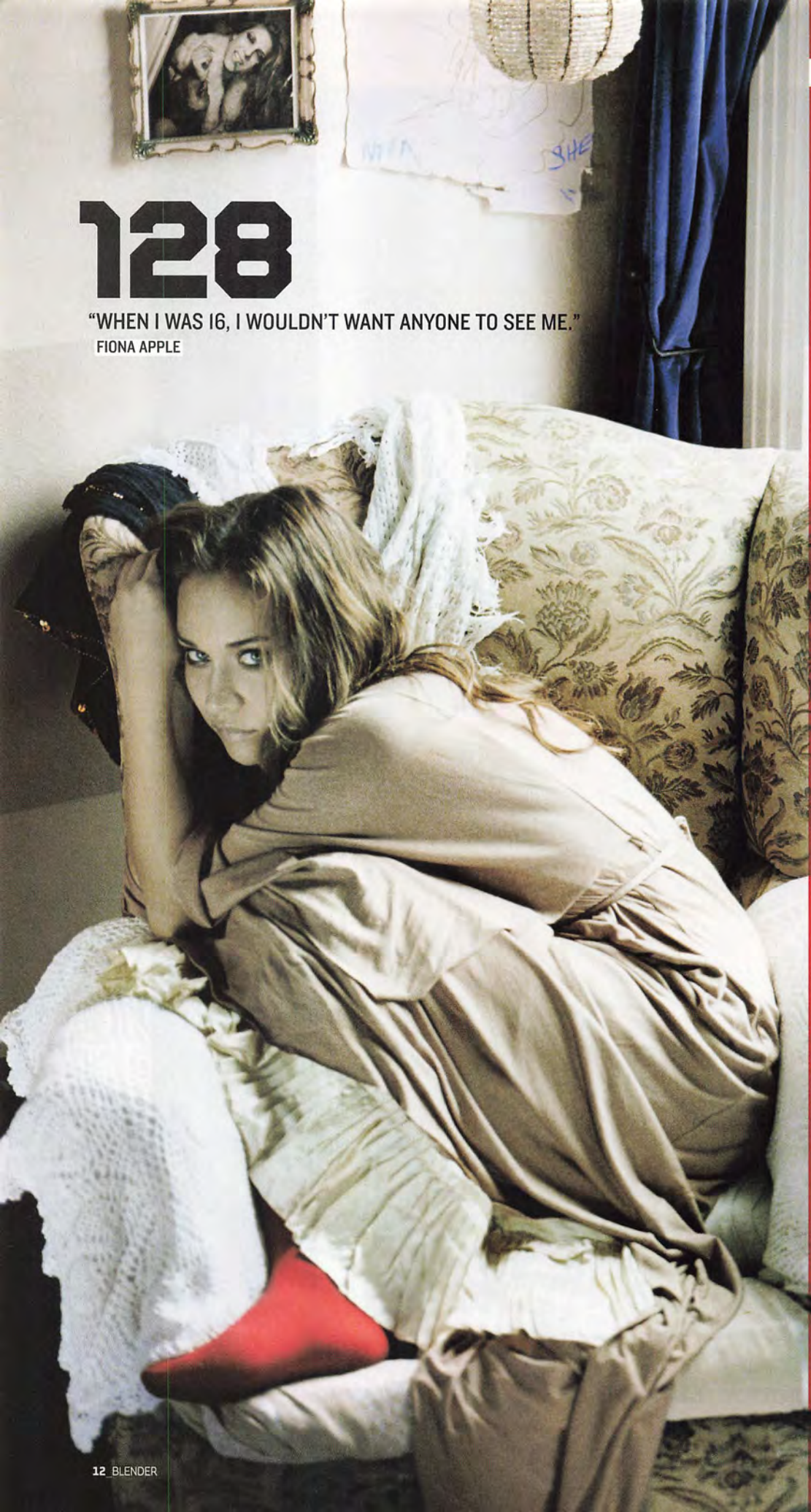

128

"WHEN I WAS 16, I WOULDN'T WANT ANYONE TO SEE ME."
FIONA APPLE

CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2005

REGULARS

20 LETTERS

186 CROSSWORD/ CHESS GAME

188 WHO DOES RICKY MARTIN THINK HE IS?
The Latin pop star is no mere himbo but has many deep and abiding interests: Buddhism, aviation and, uh, urinating.

36 BURNER
Paris Hilton cuts a record, U.S. troops rock the mic and a dolphin learns to sing. Plus: U.K. punk legend searches for the Holy Grail!

44 ALMOST FAMOUS
Giant Drag; Lady Sovereign

INSIDER

72 50 DUMBEST ROCK & ROLL PURCHASES
$3,000 scissors? $1,400 sheets? A sandwich with a pound of bacon? These are just some of the ludicrous purchases you could make—if you were a world-famous rock star.

92 DEAR SUPERSTAR: DAVE GAHAN
The Depeche Mode singer has survived drug addiction, questionable fashion choices and piercings where the sun don't shine—all to answer your trenchant questions.

98 THE GREATEST SONGS EVER: "LIVIN' ON A PRAYER"
Bon Jovi were on the brink of obscurity when a club full of wet, naked girls inspired them to record their chart-topping, blue-collar power ode.

100 MY MUSIC: DANIEL RADCLIFFE
Behind his Hogwarts robes and Harry Potter glasses, the teenage actor is just a normal English punk.

103 WHO KILLED BRIAN JONES?
The death by drowning of the original Rolling Stones guitarist was the first great rock & roll mystery—and, according to some, it's never been solved.

106 ASK BLENDER
John Denver, Chuck Berry, Kurt Cobain and the history of "Crunk."

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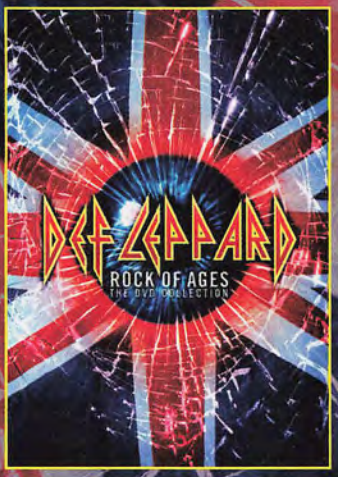

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CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2005

THE GUIDE

142 **NEW RELEASES**
Madonna, System of a Down, Neil Diamond, Juelz Santana and more

158 **TOP 40 CHART**

160 **REISSUES**
Talking Heads, Beastie Boys, Johnny Cash and more

170 **LIVE!**
My Chemical Romance; Dave Chappelle

172 **MOVIES**
The Matador, *The Ice Harvest*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and more

174 **DVDS**
Office Space, *War of the Worlds*, *House of Wax* and more

180 **GAMES**
Peter Jackson's King Kong, *Call of Duty 2*, the Xbox 360 and more

ARTIST INDEX

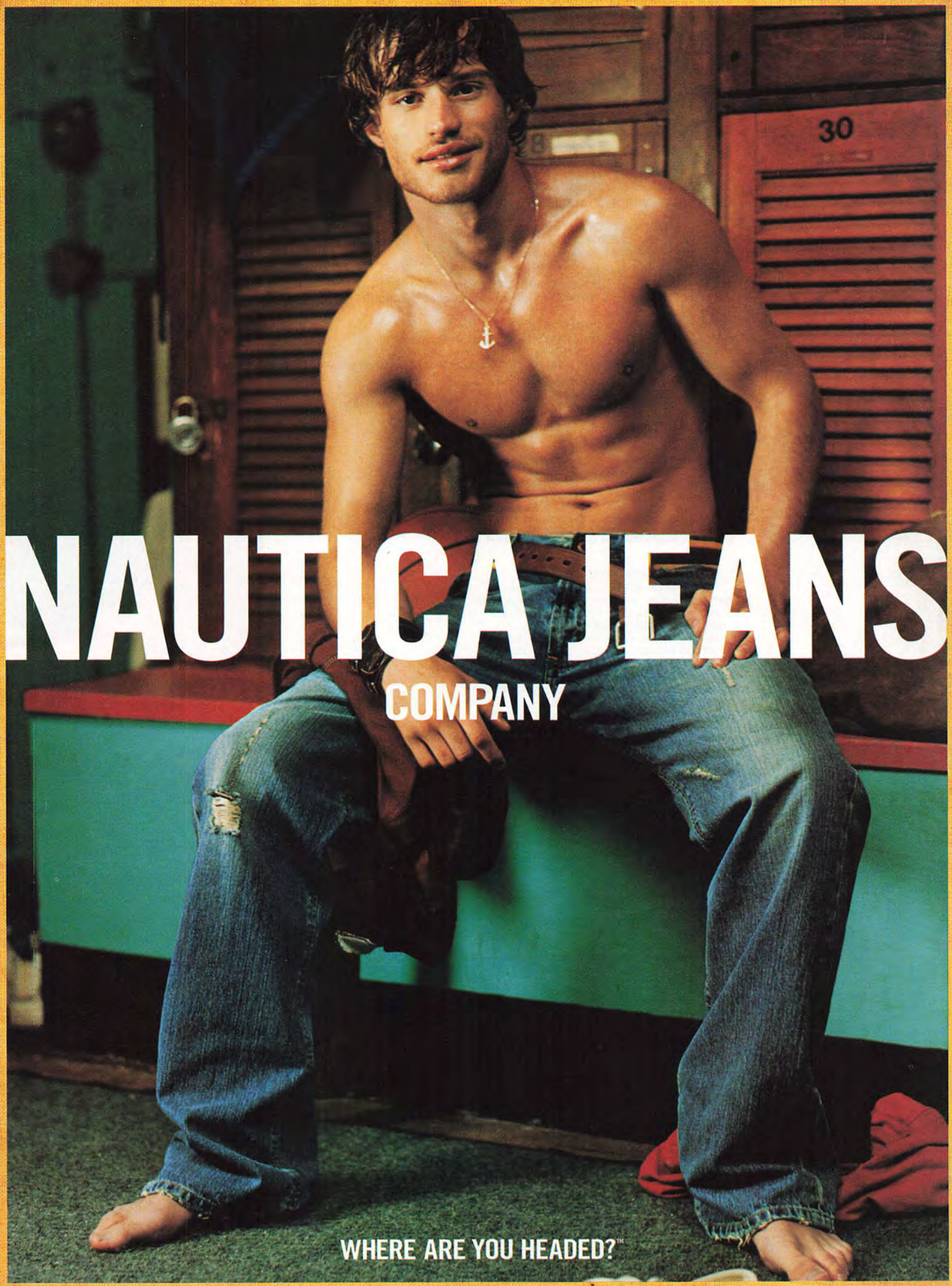
WHERE TO FIND YOUR FAVORITE PERFORMERS IN THIS MONTH'S *BLENDER*

AGUILERA, CHRISTINA 42
APPLE, FIONA 128
BON JOVI 99
BONO, FLYING HIS HAT FIRST-CLASS 80
CARTER, NICK, VOMITING ON COMMAND 54
COBAIN, KURT 74, 106
COHEED AND CAMBRIA 124
D'ANGELO, TOTALLING HIS HUMMER 46
DARKNESS, THE 148
DIAMOND, NEIL 150
DOHERTY, PETE, SPITTING AT A PHOTOGRAPHER 60
GAHAN, DAVE, WAXING HIS CHEST 96
GEORGE, BOY 37
GIANT DRAG 44
GREEN DAY 40, 175
LADY SOVEREIGN 52, 147
LOHAN, LINDSAY, TOTALLING HER MERCEDES 46
MADONNA 62
MARTIN, RICKY 188
MAYER, JOHN, SPENDING ALMOST $2K ON AN ACTION FIGURE 74
MCCARTNEY, PAUL 40
R.E.M., REUNITING AT A BOWLING ALLEY 36
SANTANA, JUELZ 155
SIMPSON, ASHLEE, FINDING STRENGTH IN FRIDGE MAGNETS 116
SYSTEM OF A DOWN 142
SPEARS, BRITNEY 62, 74
WHITE, JACK 46
WILCO 156

147

LADY SOVEREIGN HAS A WIT AND FLOW COMPARABLE TO EMINEM'S.

PEROU



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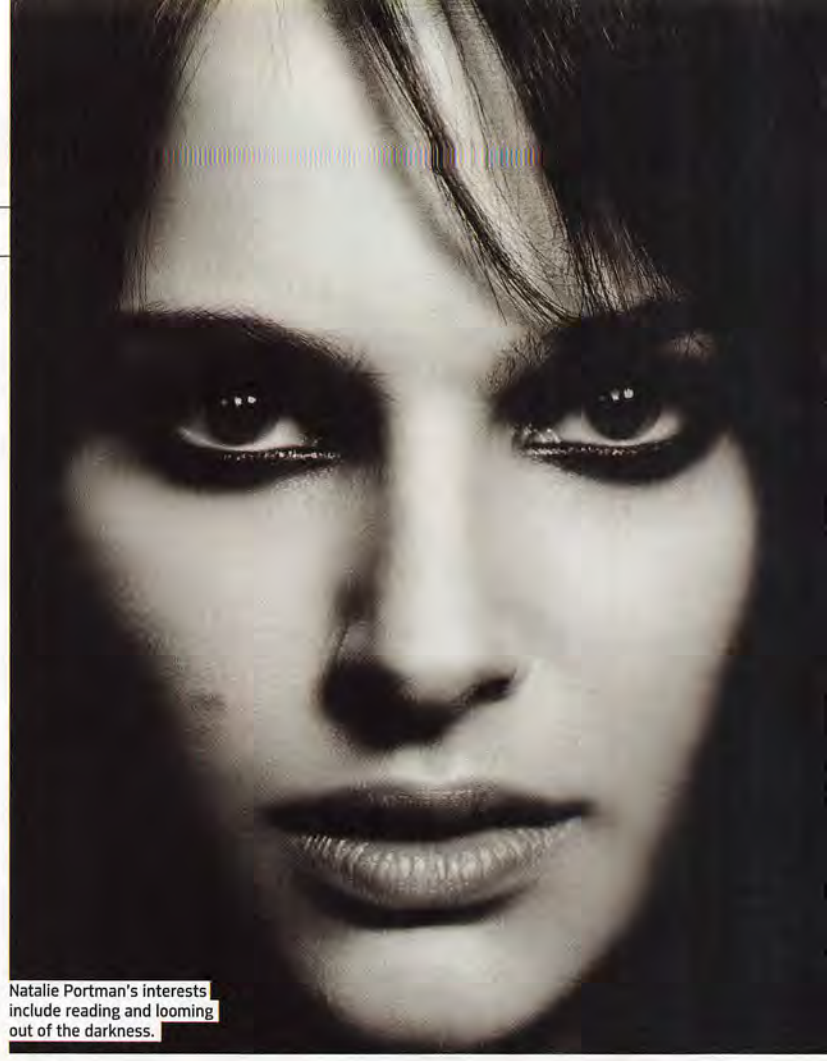

Natalie Portman's interests include reading and looming out of the darkness.

BEAUTIFUL GIRL

Congratulations! Your feature "Natalie Portman Will Change Your Life" did actually change my life. I had previously sworn never to see another Wachowski brothers movie after the fucking atrocity that was *The Matrix Revolutions*, but I'm now looking forward to *V for Vendetta*.

RICK CHANG, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

RESERVED SEATING

Thank you so much for recognizing the passing of one of the Delta blues' finest practitioners, R. L. Burnside. The lyrics on your November issue spine, "Wish I was in heaven sitting down," are from his song (and album) of the same name. I certainly hope he is.

MELISSA JAMES, LOUISVILLE, KY

SHE WAS A FAST MACHINE

"It's a long way to the top if you wanna rock and roll" is from the fantastic AC/DC song of the same title, and totally fitting for your back page subject Liz Phair—she's been around for ages and has always rocked. Thanks for recognizing two of my faves—Liz and AC/DC!

MARC PITKIN, PHOENIX

ODD SEAFOOD METAPHOR!

I know we don't need more evidence that Michael Jackson is almost an entire bucket of shrimp short of an entire bucket of shrimp. But if we did, then his thinking that a "shorter wig" makes him seem more "macho" would be it.

LAURA HERMEN, SCOTCH PLAINS, NJ

CONGRATULATIONS TO JILL TREFZ OF POWELL, OHIO, **WINNER OF *BLENDER*'S OCTOBER CROSSWORD CONTEST**, WHO SCORED A DELL AXIM.

LISTEN UP

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THE DISCIPLINARIAN

Re your Kaci Brown piece: Am I wrong to think it's sad that a 17-year-old should believe that "discipline is the refining fire by which talent becomes ability"?

PETE CINSEY, PROVIDENCE, RI

Maybe. But it's also probably one of the reasons why we're interviewing her and not, say, you.

$2 MILLION QUESTION

Why are pop stars so sensible? If I was the Veronicas and someone gave me an advance of $2 million, I wouldn't spend it on hiring producers and making an album. I'd totally spend it on ludicrous crap.

AMANDA HUNT, RICHMOND, VA

And later, you could sell it all to MC Hammer.

... AND TWINS!

I was going to say that the Veronicas were the hottest and sexiest thing to come out of Australia since ... But I couldn't think of anything hot and sexy that's ever come from Australia.

MARC LIESKENE, ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL

What about Kylie Minogue? And Elle Macpherson? And kangaroos' pouches? Or maybe that's just us.

HISTORICAL QUESTION

Having read "Life After Rock," I'm still trying to decide whether ending up working as a "Living History Reenactor" is better or worse than being the bassist in W.A.S.P.

STEVE JOHNESBURG, KANKAKEE, IL

ANOTHER BRICK

Re "The 100 Greatest Rock & Roll Movies of All Time": I always enjoy your magazine, but sometimes your lists are way off the mark. Including Pink Floyd's *Live at Pompeii* over *The Wall*? And *The Kids Are Alright* made the list while *Quadrophenia* didn't?

ROSS SANDOVAL, FREDERICK, MD

KATRINA COVERAGE

I really appreciated your coverage on the Hurricane Katrina debacle/disaster, as well as its placement at the beginning of the magazine. In interviewing the musicians from the area, not only did you get a varied cross-section of the music world, from rappers to country singers, but you also conveyed the varying degrees of rage and anguish people are feeling over the decimated city of New Orleans.

AARON DEVAN, PITTSFIELD, MA →

PORTMAN: MARK ABRAHAMS

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Next month: Nick Cannon dresses up as *Tito* Jackson!

YOU CAN DUST FOR VOMIT!

I noticed there was no "Did you know?" entry in your otherwise excellent Spinal Tap piece. So here are some …

Did you know? On the basis of his performance as Tap's manager, Tony Hendra was later asked to audition for the role of the game-show host in the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *Running Man*.

Did you know? Michael McKean is not just "a lifelong music geek" but was also briefly a member of the band Left Banke of "Walk Away Renée" fame. He left to go back to college.

Did you know? The name "Marty DiBergi" is an amalgam of four great directors' names: Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, Steven Spielberg and either Frederico Fellini or Michelangelo Antonioni (no one seems to remember which).

Did you know? Director Rob Reiner was originally going to be a member of the band but decided against it because he felt that he didn't look good in spandex.

Did you know? As all *CSI* fans know, you can now, in effect, "dust for vomit."

HANNAH LEWIS, NEWNAN, GA

Thanks for that. It puts it all in perspective. Too much fucking perspective.

MULLET LOVE

This is regarding the article where *Blender* printed a high school photo of Weezer's Rivers Cuomo ("Poodlehead"). I have always known that the man I truly loved could wear a mullet well.

KRISTI GARCIA, DENVER

SUPERFAN

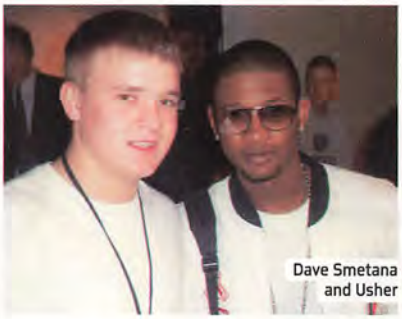
BRINGING OUT THE STALKER IN YOU SINCE 2001

David Gerhard and Trent Reznor

Jessica Simpson and Debbie Cyrus

Joan Jett and Stephan Blohin

Jerry Delgado and Robert Smith



Dave Smetana and Usher

Alanis Morissette and Nicklas Vuong

SEX "PLAY"

If Nick Cannon's taste in choosing roles was as good as his musical taste, he'd be bigger than Tom Cruise. I mean, *Garfield*? *Love Don't Cost a Thing*? Come on! But I'm not sure he did scandal-prone R. Kelly any favors by describing his album *12 Play* as "the perfect sex manual for teenagers," if you know what I'm saying.

SILVIA HENDERS, NEW YORK CITY

We do.

HE DIDN'T SHOOT SUGE (OR DID HE?)

After reading your list of dubious alibis from the various famous folks who claimed not to be the ones who shot Suge Knight ("Who Shot Suge?"), I thought I would write and offer my own. On the night in question I was at home watching a TiVo-ed episode of *Lost*. Or was I? Ha! Well, that's for me to know and for you to find out.

SIMON KODMAN, MANISTEE, MI

Or for you to know and for us to not care.

SMOOTH!

Rock goddess Liz Phair really got one over on you in her back page interview ("Who Does Liz Phair Think She Is?"). How could you morons be so gullible as to believe that Liz actually waxes herself with something called "Nad's"?

KEVIN SUTHERS, CHICAGO

Uh, because it's true? As the briefest of visits to nads.com—no, really—will prove.

MEMORY LANE

I have been a subscriber to your magazine for forever. I loved all your selections for "The 500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born." It was so nice to read the whole article; it made me reminisce. I was born in 1979, and I love almost every song you named. Some of them bring back memories of high school ("Rump Shaker") and the old-school party days ("Wild Thing" by Tone-Loc). Only your magazine would be awesome enough to feature something so outstanding.

APRIL RUSSELL, DULUTH, MN.

CANNON: TURE LILLEGRAVEN

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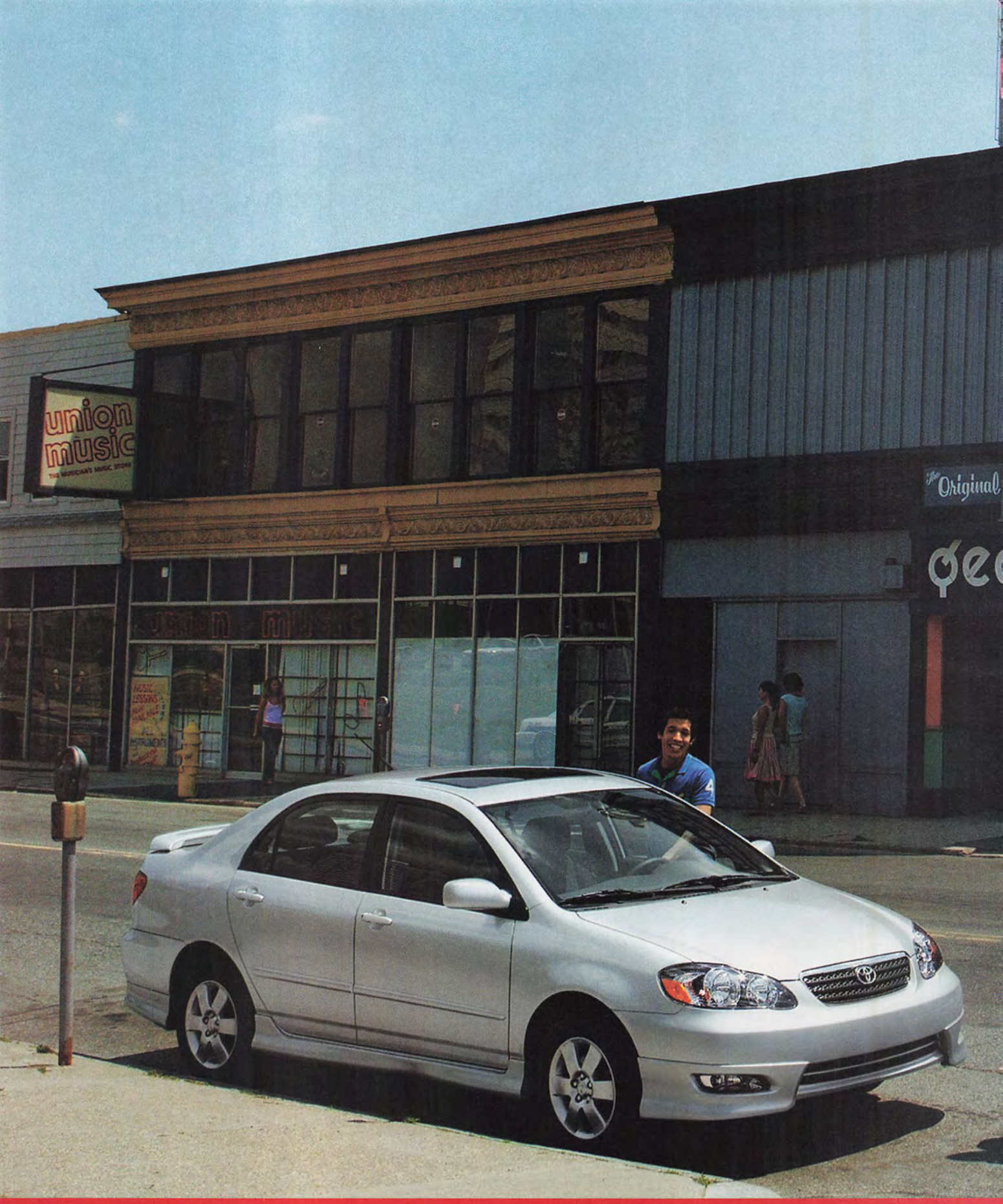
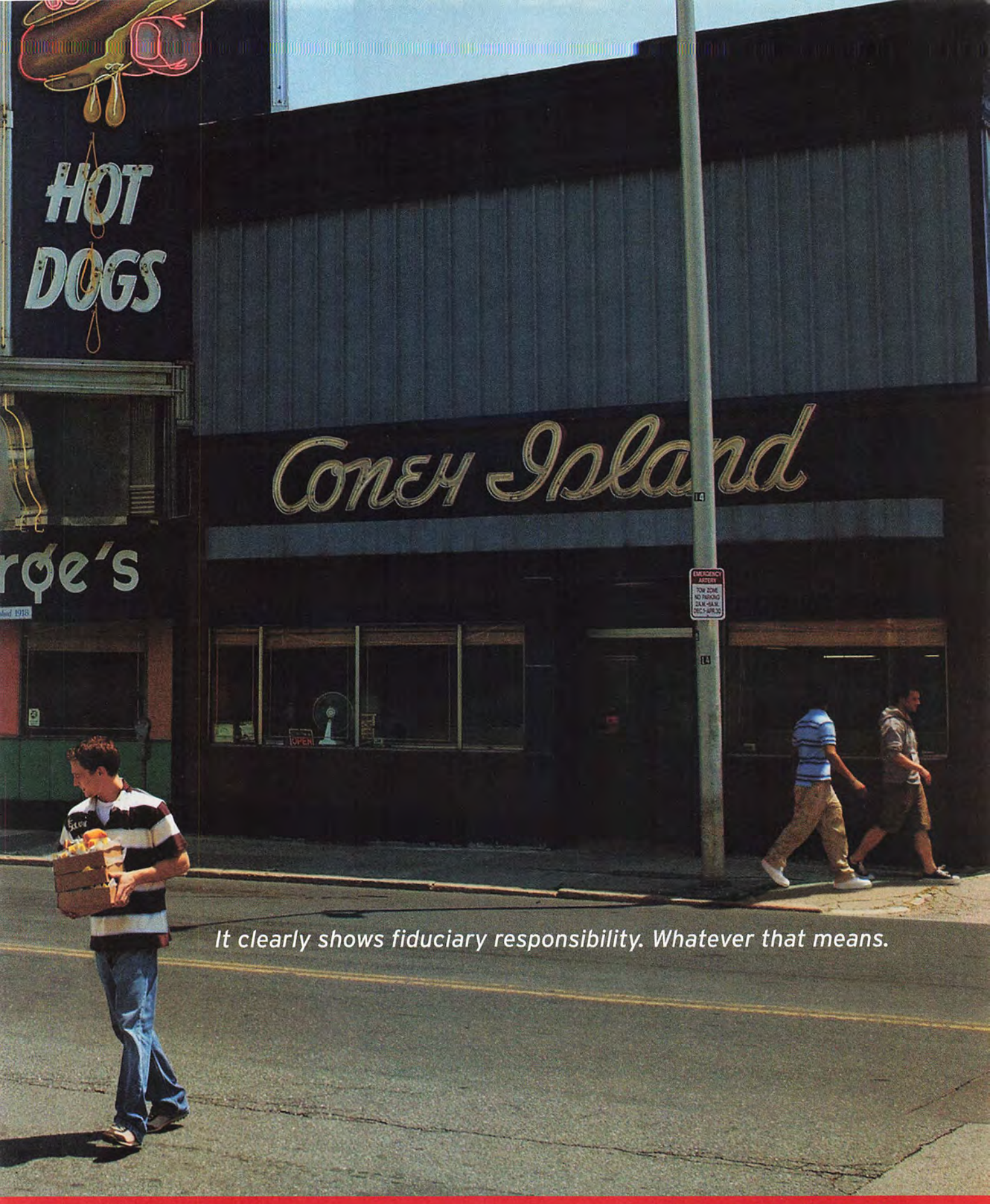


TOYOTA

Great values certainly aren't always that easy to spot. Luckily, the sleek styling of the Toyota Corolla S, with its available sport

Corolla S shown with available equipment. ©2005 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.



It clearly shows fiduciary responsibility. Whatever that means.

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Jamie Foxx doomed to appear in *Booty Call 2* after black cat crosses path.

Spinal Tap: Incredibly, one of these people is married to Jamie Lee Curtis.

ZIG-A-ZIG AH!

While I find few faults with your "500 Greatest Songs" issue, I take offense at the omission of the Spice Girls' "Wannabe" from your list. This song had it all: a "D" quality video, nonsensical lyrics, sub-par performances from untrained vocalists and—perhaps most important—an open invitation to shag the girls' best friends.

LYNNE REGENT, LOS ANGELES

THANKS, CUZ

I thoroughly enjoyed your list of "The 500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born." It's the first of its kind to recognize the greatest songs of the '80s, '90s and the "totally awesome aughts." Amid my amusement, I noticed a slight error in No. 487: "Regulate" by Warren G. *Blender* writes that Dr. Dre is Warren G's "cuz," when in fact they are half-brothers.

SARAH HOIEN, OMAHA

We just meant "cuz" as a term of endearment. Okay, uh ... cuz?

KELLY VS. NEW ORDER

Regarding No. 97 on your "500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born" list, "Since U Been Gone" by Kelly Clarkson: Can I please get sick of (and then over) hearing a song on the radio before I see it on a "Greatest" list? And by the way, I would have canceled my subscription had it been ahead of New Order (No. 96)—too close for my comfort.

LISA HART, CUMMING, GA

WRONG, WRONG, WRONG

How the hell could you omit Mötley Crüe from the 500 list? There are many a Crüe song that could be on this list, but most shocking of all is that "Girls, Girls, Girls," a staple of gentleman's clubs worldwide, is nowhere in sight. I'm quite positive that if that song came on, every guy in the room would know the words and be amped as hell. To me that makes a great song.

SCOTT FREDERICK, BRIGHTON, MI

To us as well. Which is why we put it at No. 77. Maybe your local "gentleman's club" needs better lighting.

NUTS!

Is Eddie Murphy's "Party All the Time" really such a good song to play at a party (as Jamie Foxx claimed in his "Dear Superstar" interview)? Yes! But only if you want someone—possibly me, for example—to threaten to kick you in the nuts.

MIKEY WINZER, SANTA MONICA, CA

GENIUS!

Thank you for the great review of Coheed and Cambria's new album, *Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV: Volume One*, but you didn't have the full title, which ends with *From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness*. Yes that was nerdy. Then again, I am a huge CoCa fan. One more thing though: When using words to describe Coheed and Cambria, especially frontman Claudio Sanchez, you used "nerdy" and "geeky," but you forgot the most important: "genius."

JOSEPH BRUN, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

So impressed were we by your letter that we decided to run a feature on Coheed and Cambria (see page 124). OK, so we were planning to do it already. But enjoy it anyway, you big, nerdy galoot, you!

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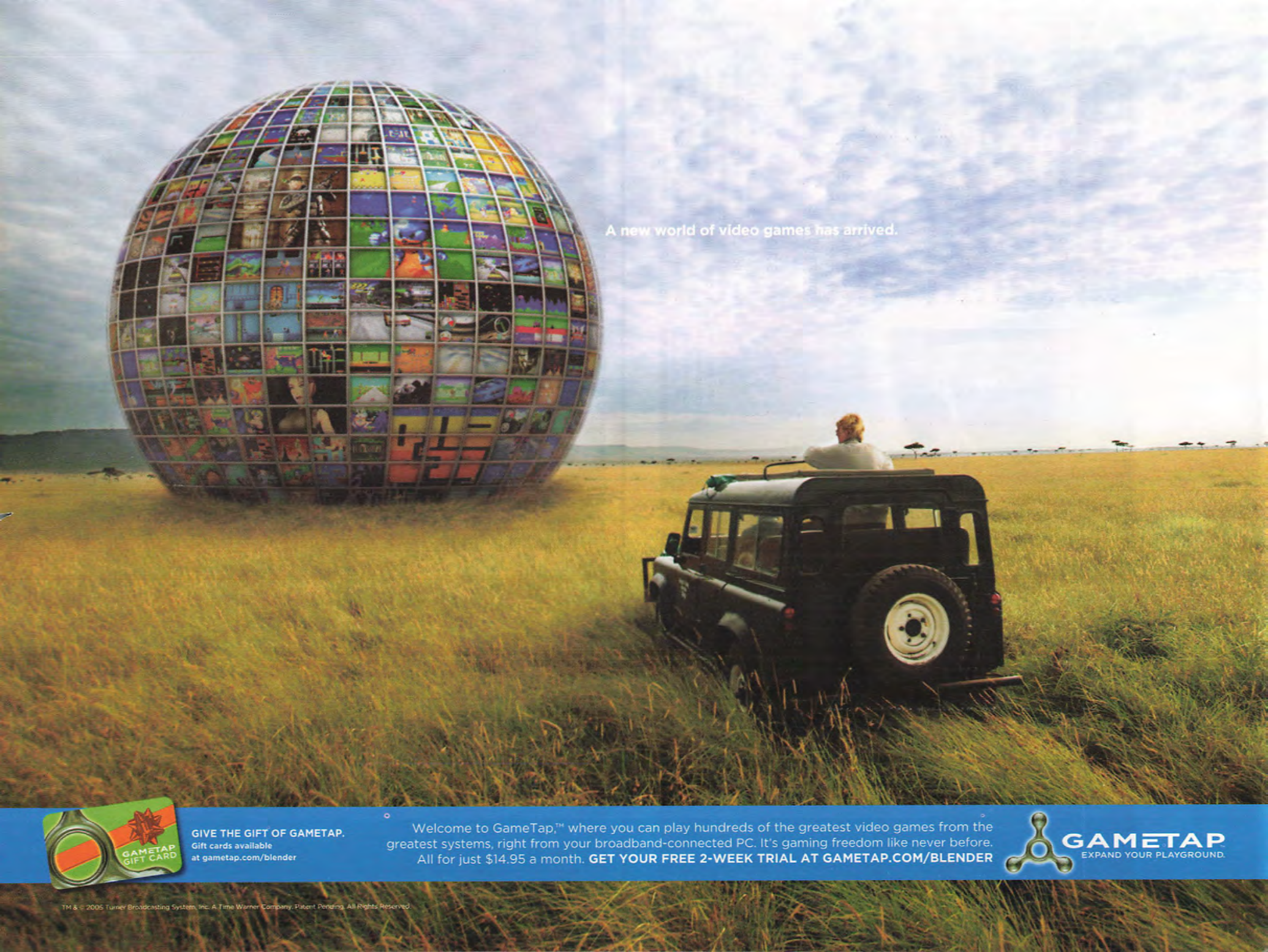
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Staci Flood's one-woman version of *Chicago* was off-off-off-off-*off* Broadway.

FLOOD: LAUREN GREENFIELD

ALMOST FAMOUS

I almost didn't read your "I Want a Famous Face" piece about Staci Flood and her struggle up and/or sideways on the Hollywood food chain. But I'm stoked that I did. It's by far one of the most fascinating and touching features I've ever come across. Although she seems to be chasing an increasingly unlikely-to-come-true dream, I can't help hoping that *Blender* will help her achieve it. At least she's clearly got *some* talent, unlike so many of the people that actually become stars.

JACKI ROBYNS, GREAT FALLS, MT

CAREER ADVICE

Perhaps if Staci Flood wants people to see her as a whole person, she should stop shaking her ass in a "dance troupe" called the Bombshell Babies.

JOAQUIN FEDERIS, MINOT, ND

CORRECTION

In "The 100 Greatest Rock & Roll Movies of All Time" (November), the following writers were not credited for their contributions to the story: Eric Alt, Clark Collis, Josh Eells, Lauren Harris, Andrew Harrison, Steve Kandell, Glenn Kenny, Ben Mitchell, Tony Power, Brian Raftery, Peter Ruben, Gabe Soria and Jonah Weiner. *Blender* regrets the oversight.

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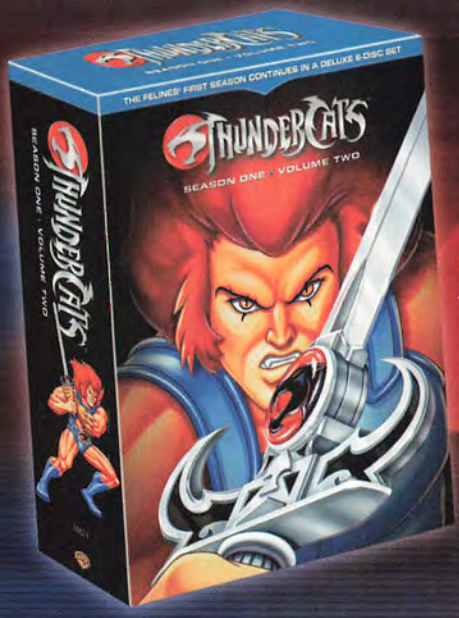

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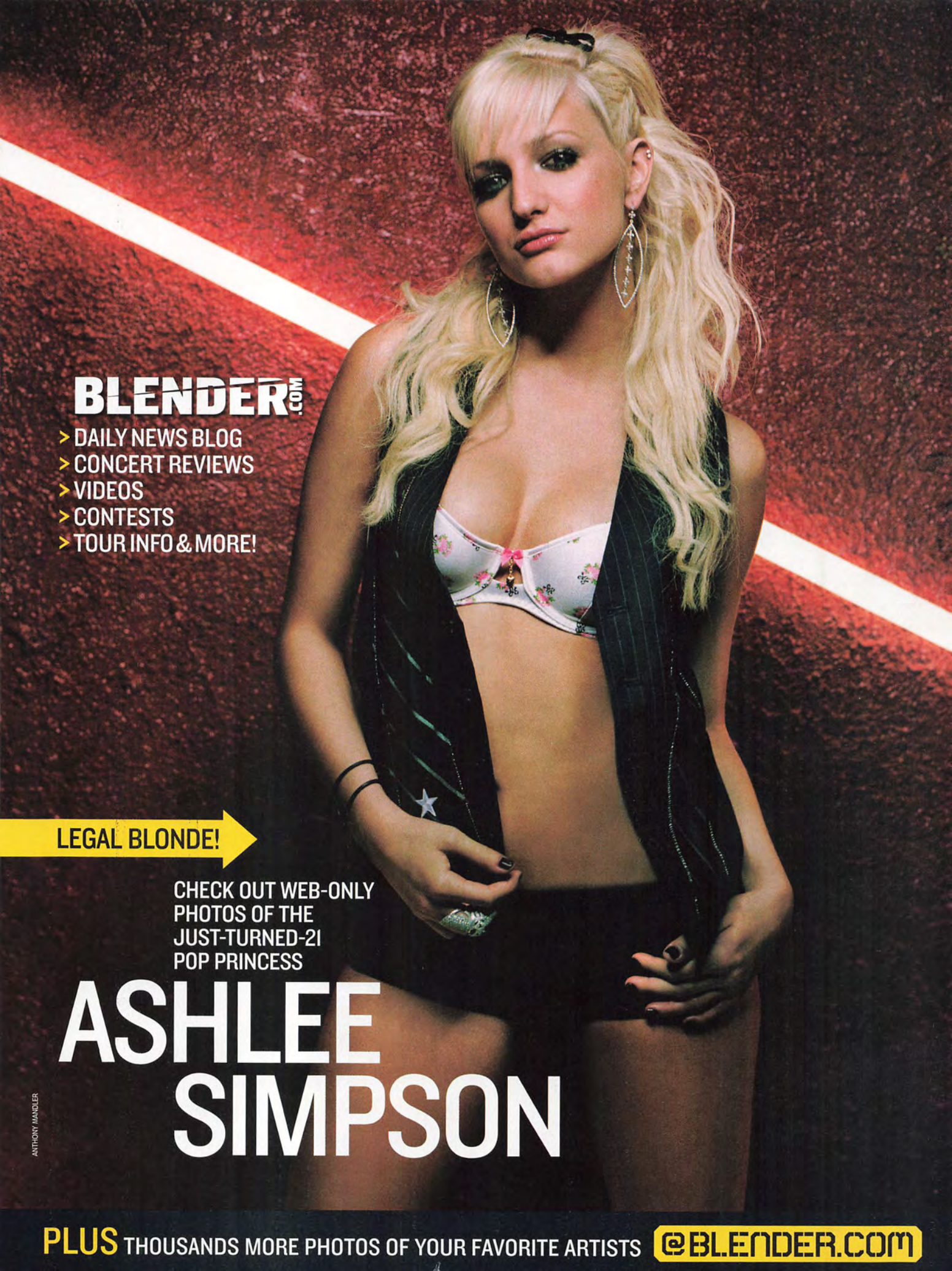
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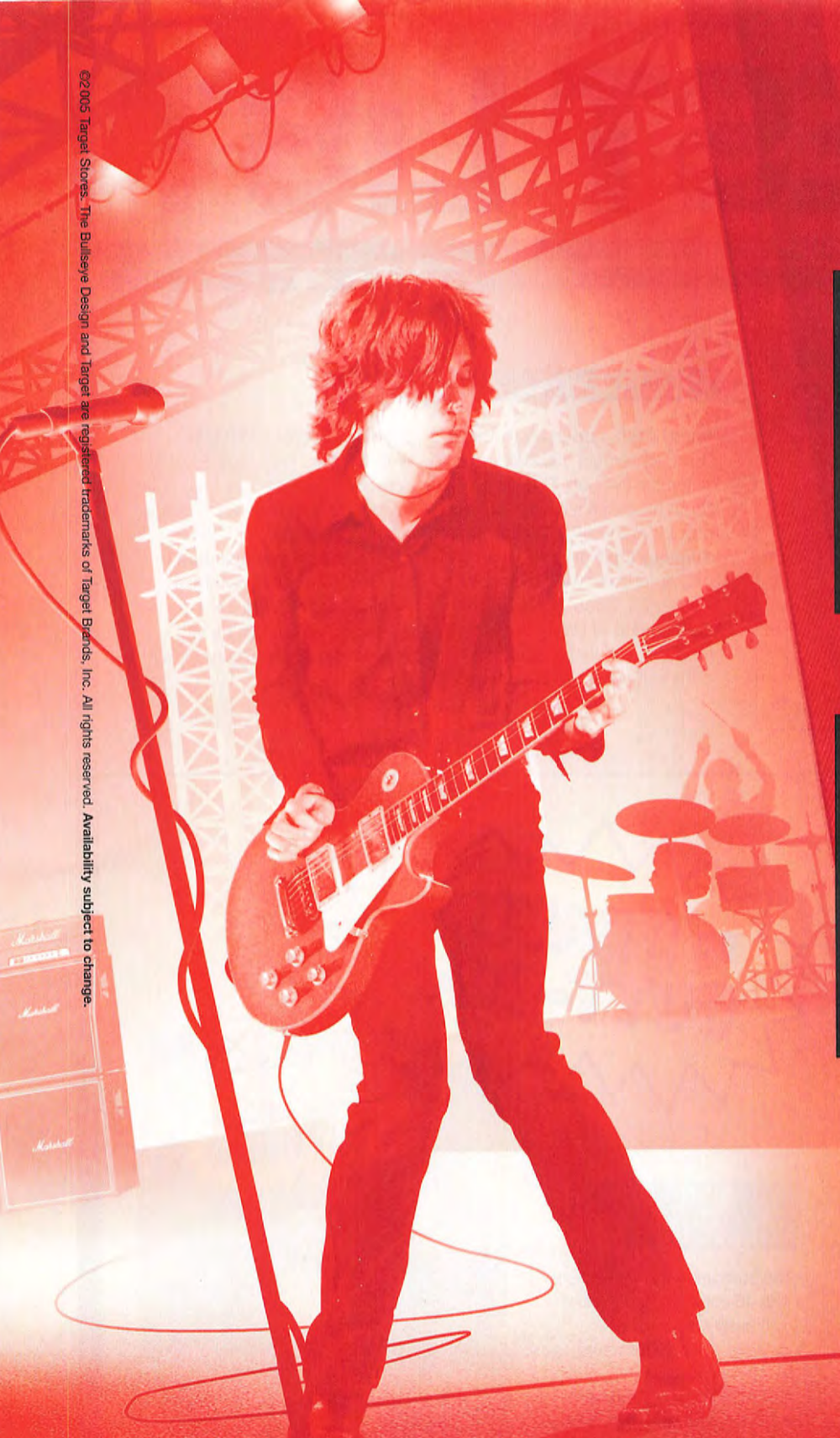

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WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

THE LEGEND OF JOHNNY CASH

Johnny Cash passed away at age 71 on September 12, 2003, but his legend lives on. The first album to span his entire career, from 1955 to 2003, **The Legend of Johnny Cash** (Island/Sony BMG/American/UMe), released October 25, 2005, will lead into the premiere of **I Walk The Line**, the 20th Century Fox film based on his early years and starring Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon. Featuring 21 of his recordings on the Sun, Columbia, Island and American Recordings labels, *The Legend of Johnny Cash* is **the first compilation to include his work on American.** Also highlighting the package is a 16-page deluxe booklet with photos and essay by author Rich Kienzle.

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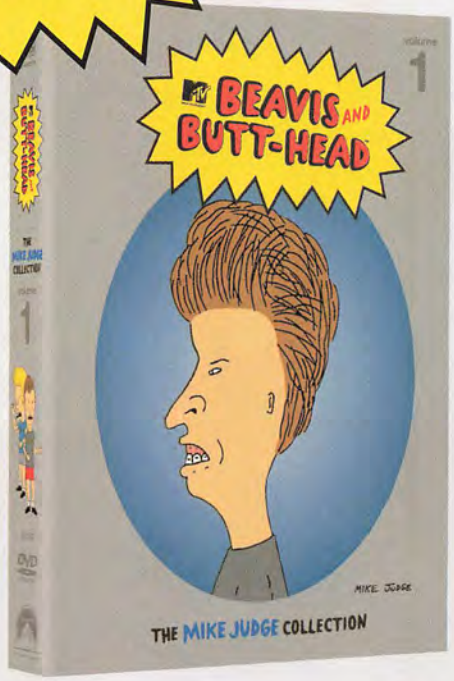

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WHEN THE *BATMAN* THEME WAS PLAYED FOR SOME DOLPHINS, ONE SPONTANEOUSLY "SANG" ALONG. P.54

12.05

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ... AND PLENTY YOU DON'T!

BURNER

KINGPINS!

R.E.M.'S SURPRISE REUNION AT A GEORGIA BOWLING ALLEY

ALTERNATIVE-ROCK stalwarts R.E.M. recently reunited with retired drummer Bill Berry for a one-time-only gig at their guitar tech's wedding reception. The seven-song set at Athens, Georgia's Kingpins Bowl and Brew, which included early classics like "Begin the Begin," "The One I Love" and "Radio Free Europe," was the first time all four members had performed together since 2003. "It was awesome to look behind me and see Bill on drums," said bassist Mike Mills, pictured singing "(Don't Go Back to) Rockville." Owner Ed Connolly agreed: "They really blew the doors off the dump." *JOSH EELLS*

From left: Michael Stipe, Bill Berry, Mike Mills, Peter Buck.

R.E.M.: GEORGE VERNER; DOLPHIN: TIM DAVIS/CORBIS

COCAINE CLUB

BOY GEORGE HOARDS BLOW, GETS ARRESTED, FLEES COUNTRY

BOY GEORGE IS being brought up on drug charges after cocaine was found in his New York City apartment. The flamboyant singer, whose real name is George O'Dowd, could face up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

George, who spent time in recovery for heroin addiction in 1986, called the police in early October to report a burglary in his Little Italy apartment. Allegedly, a male prostitute he had hired that evening had threatened to rob him. The prostitute had already left by the time police arrived to find 13 baggies containing a total of more than 3.5 grams of cocaine. George spent the night in prison on charges of drug possession and falsely reporting a burglary.

The 44-year-old former Culture Club frontman then fled to his native England, where he remarked to waiting reporters at Heathrow Airport, "Don't ask me any questions because you aren't going to get any answers." George is expected to appear in a New York court in December. *LAUREN HARRIS*

Boy George leaving the police station on October 8. Inset: George in 1983.

SETH WENIG/REUTERS/NEWSCOM; INSET: STEN ROSENLUND/REX/USA

REVOLUTION IN EVOLUTION.

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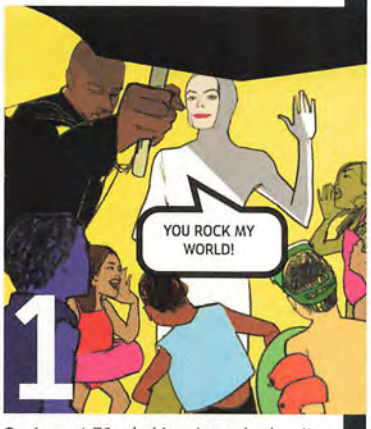
AQUAFREAK

MICHAEL JACKSON RENTS ENTIRE DUBAI WATER PARK, ARRIVES IN SKINTIGHT DOLPHIN OUTFIT



On August 31, clad in a Lycra bodysuit with only his eyes, mouth and nose exposed, Jacko mingles with children and their parents for an afternoon at Dubai's Wild Wadi Water Park.

Determined not to soak up any of the sun's harmful rays, the reclusive singer spends most of the three hours he had rented in the shade of a bar, sipping water and signing autographs.

The pale-faced Jackson finally braves the sunlight as he slides down a tube of gushing water with his prepubescent admirers. *TONY MCMENAMIN*

NEWS ROUNDUP

RADIOHEAD's Thom Yorke has been asked by environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth to meet British prime minister Tony Blair to discuss climate change. Wondering whether to accept the offer, the singer said in a posting on the band's website, "Blair has been uttering nonsense lately about Kyoto … looks like the American right have finally eaten his mind."

LIL JON has accused Hustler Video of using his name and likeness in a porn movie without permission. In a $30 million lawsuit, he claims the company lifted concert footage for *Phat Tuesday*, which features five sexually active women let loose at Mardi Gras.

WASCALLY!

DRUNKEN, MAN-SIZED BUNNY ENTERTAINS GREEN DAY FANS

The giant pink bunny who routinely warms up Green Day audiences by dancing to "Y.M.C.A." and miming a terrible hangover beats the heat by drinking a cold beer onstage at the Home Depot Center in Carson, California, in early October. Though similar in appearance, the rabbit, whose identity is a closely guarded secret but is thought to be a rotating cast of crew members, is not related to the giant pink bunny who dances onstage with the Flaming Lips or the man-sized pink bunny who followed David Bowie during his 2004 tour. *STEVE KNOPPER*

WORD!

"I LOVE THE COCKNEY ACCENT, SO I'M GONNA LEARN IT."
MARIAH CAREY

SENIOR SWIM

GERIATRIC BEATLE FIGHTS ENCROACHING AGE WITH WATERSPORTS

"WILL YOU STILL NEED me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?" wrote a youthful and happy-go-lucky Paul McCartney on a classic Beatles song. But with his 64th year approaching next June—and having just wrapped a tour in support of his new album, *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard*—the elderly rocker is taking a more serious approach to his advancing years by practicing his swim strokes, as seen here in a Miami pool. *TONY MCMENAMIN*

Paul McCartney: "Yesterday … this pool was warmer."

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN JAY; BUNNY: KELLY A. SWIFT/RETNA LTD.; GREEN DAY: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM; MCCARTNEY: SPLASH NEWS; CAREY: GREGORY PACE/FILMMAGIC.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

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CLUB WED!

XTINA GOES PRE-BRIDAL SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Christina Aguilera headed to Mexico for a marathon bachelorette party. Clad in a "bride to be" tiara and veil, the pop star hit Cabo San Lucas clubs with her galpals.

The "Dirrty" singer, who became engaged to music executive Jordan Bratman in February, spent time poolside with girlfriends, swimming and imbibing.

Sporting her rhinestone-encrusted tiara, Aguilera spots the paparazzi and sticks out her currently unpierced tongue.

NEWS ROUNDUP

DMX has followed in the footsteps of Michael Jackson after blaming a court non-appearance on a bout of bad health. "We believe it may be food poisoning," explained lawyer Renee Hill when his client missed a hearing in the Bronx stemming from his arrest in April for driving with a suspended license.

R. KELLY and wife Andrea have officially separated. The singer's spouse was recently granted an emergency protective order accusing her husband of physical abuse, stalking, harassment and interfering with her personal liberty. In a statement, the troubled singer said he was hoping to work things out.

WORD!

"KANYE WEST IS SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE OF ME."

50 CENT

Sgt. Ronin Clay steps up to the mic in Baghdad.

HIPHOPALYPSE NOW

AMERICAN SOLDIERS ON THE FRONTLINES RAP ABOUT LIFE ON THE BATTLEFIELD

FROM A SHACK on their Baghdad compound, seven soldiers from the U.S. Army's First Cavalry Division have recorded *Live From Iraq*, an album detailing the hardship of their daily experience.

The project is called 4th25—which is pronounced "Fourth Quarter"—and is the brainchild of Sgt. Neal Saunders, who started by asking his fellow soldiers to rap lines to let off steam, into a mic attached to a Compaq PC. Their military superiors encouraged their efforts, not realizing that the budding rappers' intentions were deeply serious.

Given the opportunity for self-expression, the soldiers—deployed from Fort Hood, Texas, in March 2004—delivered a hard-hitting communiqué from the frontline. "They thought it was going to be 'I'm riding on 24's' or something like that," explained former Staff Sgt. Terrance Staves, who raps on the tracks "Lace Your Boots" and "Fuckem." "But they didn't understand that we were telling nothing but the truth."

While not necessarily antiwar or anti-Bush, the lyrics are aggressively outspoken about the problems faced by ordinary servicemen.

One track was inspired by the deaths of eight fellow soldiers in April 2004. Another criticizes what the soldiers see as the war's chronic underfunding and murky objectives: "Turning more than a cheek/Warm hearts turn cold/Higher people in command/Planning with no type of goals."

The division returned home in March 2005 and within two weeks, 2,000 copies of the record had been produced. The album gained respectable online sales and positive, often emotional, reaction from the families of troops still serving in Iraq.

Despite their fledgling status in the rap game, 4th25 have already started dissing the competition. One song chides rappers who call themselves "soldiers," saying: "Most of you wanksters ain't never seen the fleet/You talk about war and you've only seen the street."

The CD's success prompted Saunders to take on the promotion of the album (available at www.4th25.com) full-time after his tour of duty ended earlier this year. Official response from military high command has been muted, although some form of discipline for the rappers seems possible. *STEVE LOWE*

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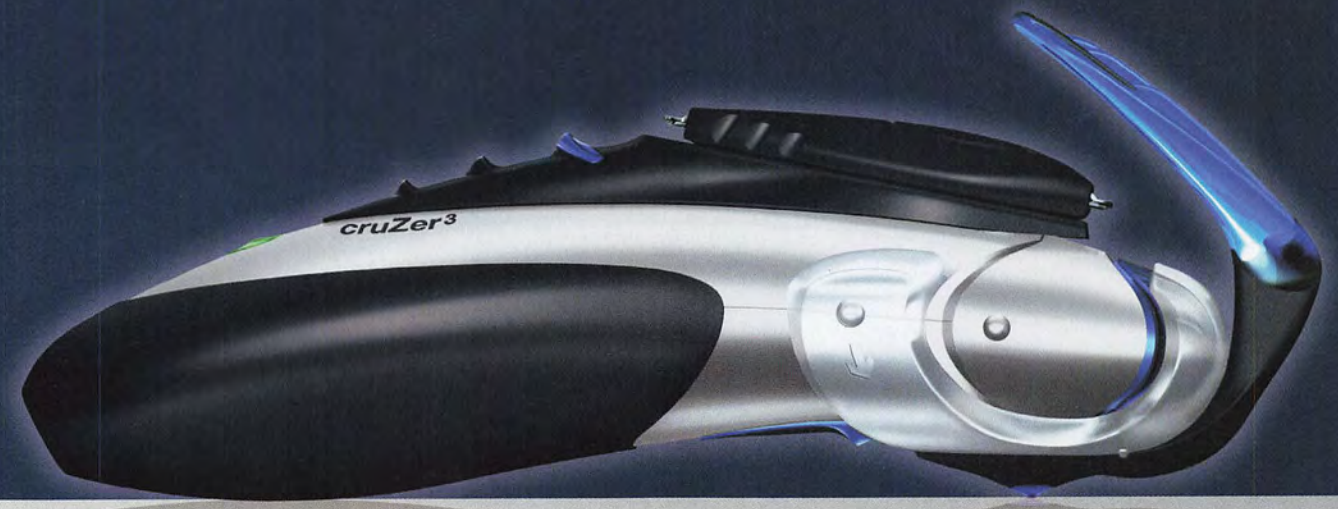

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BRAUN

ALMOST FAMOUS

GIANT DRAG

L.A. INDIE-POPPERS SING LIKE KITTY CATS, SWEAR LIKE SAILORS

BY JOSH EELLS
PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL LEWIS

ANNIE HARDY HAS the voice of a 6-year-old, which wouldn't be so strange were it not for two things. First, she's 24. And second, she curses like a Tourette's-stricken dockworker who just dropped an anchor on his foot.

"That sound guy was yelling like a bitch," says Hardy, the singer and guitarist for L.A. indie duo Giant Drag, recalling last night's less-than-stellar show, over drinks at a Brooklyn bar. Apparently the playful frontwoman started out the concert by sprinkling confetti all over the stage—a bit of theatricality the soundman and club owner did not appreciate. Not that she cares. "They were all being fucking cunts."

Hardy and drummer-keyboardist Micah Calabrese—they're not an item—met two years ago, when he was working with her mom at an online self-help emporium co-founded by Melanie Griffith. ("Pretty much the worst job ever," Calabrese, 27, says.) Their debut, *Hearts and Unicorns*, is dreamy guitar pop highlighted by ex-boyfriend-dissing jams like "This Isn't It," "YFLMD"—which stands for "You Fuck Like My Dad"—and "Kevin Is Gay," in which Hardy sings an entire verse using only the word "meow," like Karen O doing a cat food jingle.

Hardy grew up in Orange County, California, but she loves the Fox TV show a lot more than the real thing. "It sucked," she says of her hometown. "It's a bad place to raise children—there's nothing to do. If you're not a surfer, you're just doing lots of drugs."

And we take it she's not a surfer?

"The last two times I went into the ocean I had to get saved by a lifeguard," she laughs. "The undertow sucked me right out—fucking Hasselhoff had to come get me. I haven't been back since."

OUT NOW *HEARTS AND UNICORNS* KICKBALL/INTERSCOPE

ALL ABOUT US!

FAVORITE BOOK
Great Chiefs. It's about Native Americans. (Hardy)

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
"Gold Digger" by Kanye West. The beats are sick. (Calabrese)

HIDDEN TALENT
I can do that Russian dance. (Calabrese)

OBSESSIONS
Little dogs! I freak out when I see them. (Hardy)

Giant Drag, left to right: Annie Hardy, Micah Calabrese.

DREAMY GUITAR POP HIGHLIGHTED BY EX-BOYFRIEND-DISSING JAMS LIKE "KEVIN IS GAY."

STYLING: JOHANNA LARACUENTE GROOMING: DEBORAH ALTIZIO AT ARTISTSOFT USING STILA

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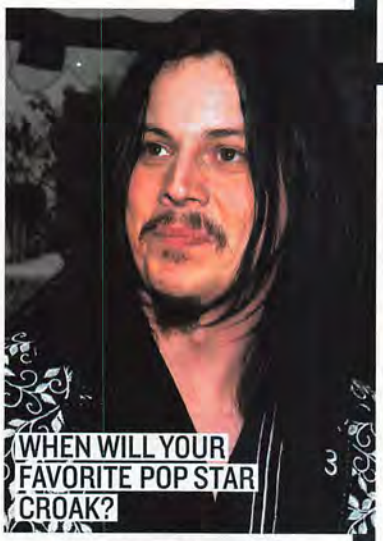

WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

#24 JACK WHITE

BIRTH DATE	JULY 9, 1975
CURRENT AGE	30
DEATH CALCULATOR STARTS AT AGE	79

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
White male.	-2
Neurobic: Gifted songwriter, producer.	+4
Deadly anemic diet: Cheeseburgers and onion rings.	-4
Rage issues: Arrested for assaulting Von Bondies singer Jason Stollsteimer (later sentenced to anger management).	-2
Prone to fantasy: Fabricated bio, changed name, claimed Jason started the brawl.	-2
Career-threatening injury: Finger crushed in car accident.	-3
Antisocial tendencies: Hates encores, autographs, T-shirts, fame.	-2
Identity issues: Severe change of dress; sports weird facial hair.	-3
Anxiety : "I'm scared to enjoy what we do."	-2
Smoker: Chain-smoker, partner smokes, lives in air-polluted Detroit.	-8
Workaholic stress: "My schedule is so insane," does "five things at once."	-2
Wedding woes: Divorced Meg (-2) but maintains close relationship (+1).	-1
Self-absorbed: Monopolizes interviews, speaks for Meg.	-1
Family: Married with child on the way.	+2
Respect: Legends Loretta Lynn and Bob Dylan have spoken about his talent.	+3
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	56
PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH	2031

Gerontologist **DR. DEMKO:** "White could turn the tables by adopting life-extending habits: A healthy diet, lay off the cancer sticks and learn to keep that famous temper in check."

NEWS ROUNDUP

COURTNEY LOVE's mother has written a book accusing her daughter of being a violent drug addict. A spokesman for the singer labeled *Her Mother's Daughter* a "work of vicious and greedy fiction."

VANESSA CARLTON is in training for the New York City Marathon following her success in the Continental Airlines Fifth Avenue New York Road Runners race, when she came in eighteenth out of 302 female runners in her age group.

BOB DYLAN has entered talks about a sequel to the recent Martin Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home*, taking up the legend's story from his 1966 motorcycle crash onwards.

WORD!

"EVERYBODY CALLS ME 'MOM' IN MY REAL LIFE."
JENNIFER LOPEZ

Lindsay Lohan was not injured when she crashed her Mercedes.

D'Angelo was thrown out of the window of his Hummer when he drove into a fence.

TOTALED-LY!

CELEBRITY CAR CRASHES REPLACE CELEBRITY SEX TAPES IN POPULARITY

LINDSAY LOHAN PLOWED her Mercedes-Benz convertible into the van of an L.A. busboy after shopping in West Hollywood.

Though a publicist for the teen queen blamed aggressive photographers for the wreck, investigating police said the star was not being chased when she ran into Raymundo Ortega, who was trying to fit into a parking spot, and that "paparazzi were not a factor in the traffic collision."

Ortega, a father of six, fired back at the actress, saying she showed no concern for his well-being after the crash. He was treated for minor injuries.

Just three weeks before, no paparazzi were present when '90s R&B crooner D'Angelo's Hummer struck a fence and flipped over. The singer, who was not wearing a seatbelt, flew through the window, was critically injured and spent five days in a Richmond, Virginia, hospital.

Upon his release, he said he was eager to get back in the studio to work on his first album since 2000. *JOHANNA PIAZZA*

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ROB SCHNEIDER FOR *DEUCE BIGALOW, EUROPEAN GIGOLO*

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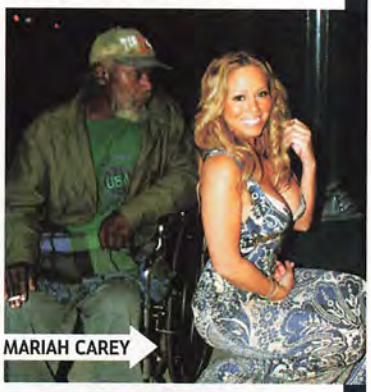
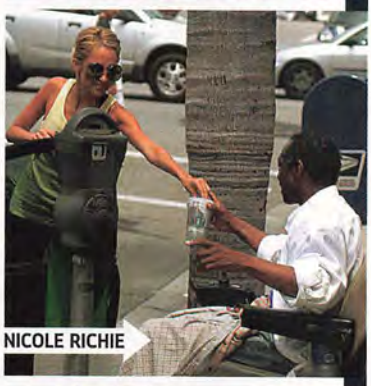


MARIAH CAREY



NICOLE RICHIE

PARIS HILTON

DIDDY

NEWS ROUNDUP

BEANIE SIGEL's stepfather, Samuel Derry, 46, was found dead October 4 after having been shot and set on fire. The motive for his murder is unknown but is suspected to be related to Sigel's recent attempted-murder court case. A close friend of Derry's was abducted a day after the murder, but police are calling the crimes "a coincidence."

Macon, Georgia, Mayor Jack Ellis has criticized local companies for failing to raise $75,000 for a hometown concert by local legend LITTLE RICHARD. A city spokesman said the mayor was disappointed in the businesses because "They've been using Little Richard now for several years to promote Macon and he's not charged them one dime."

WORD!

"I DIDN'T DO THIS TO GET LAID, BUT IT'S PART OF THE JOB."

KEITH RICHARDS

Make Believe's Nate Kinsella put on a pair of shorts before being hauled off to jail.

MEMBERS ONLY

AN INDIE ROCKER EXPOSES HIS "GENITALIA AND PENIS" TO UNSUSPECTING CHRISTIANS

THE DRUMMER OF Chicago secular indie-rockers Make Believe is facing up to 10 years in prison after exposing himself to music-loving Christians.

According to the police affidavit, Nate Kinsella "walked to the front of the stage and took off his pants and exposed his genitalia and penis to the crowd" during the band's set at the Wherehouse in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, on June 28. Unburdened by his clothing, he then proceeded to squeeze the sweat from his shorts over the heads of those in the front row of the non-air-conditioned venue. Temperatures outside ranged in the mid-90s that day.

When police officers asked the 200-strong audience if they had been disturbed by what they had seen, "half of the crowd raised their hands"; Kinsella was then handcuffed and arrested for indecent exposure. If convicted, he faces maximum penalties of $20,000 in addition to jail time. Kinsella would also have to register as a sex offender in Oklahoma.

It was Make Believe's first time touring with Christian bands mewithoutYou and Veda. "We wanted to play in front of people who had no idea who we were or what to expect," says Tim Kinsella, Nate's brother and bandmate. *CHRIS VARIAS*

WEIRD BAND ALERT

THOR THE ROCK WARRIOR

MUSCLES, METAL, NORSE MYTHOLOGY. SEE YOU AT THE GRAMMYS!

AS IN THOR, THE GOD OF THUNDER?
No. As in Thor from Vancouver. The guy who's been combining the magic of bodybuilding, comic books, hard rock and great hair since the '70s.

HAS STAYING RELEVANT BEEN A PROBLEM?
No. Reinvention, he says, is the key. And blowing up hot water bottles and tearing license plates in two onstage, apparently. "I've always tried new things," says Thor, born John Mikl Thor.

Thor prepares to open a really big letter.

BUT WHAT ABOUT HIS '90S NÜ-METAL PHASE?
Not an issue. "It's my right as an artist to experiment with various forms," says Thor.

CAN THIS GO ON FOREVER?
Sadly, no. "All warriors must lay down the sword and the shield and go into the sunset." *DAVE HILL*

KINSELLA: JOSH BENDER; THOR: COURTESY OF THOR; CAREY: FAME PICTURES; RICHIE: KONEH/X17 AGENCY.COM; HILTON: STEFAN/X17 AGENCY.COM; DIDDY: FAME PICTURES; RICHARDS: MICHAEL IOCCISANO/FILMMAGIC.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

 "No shoes, no shirt, no problems/Blues, what blues?/Hey, I forgot them."

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which one did
The New York Times
declare their
"hands-down favorite"?

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we described as classic."

ERIC ASIMOV,
THE NEW YORK TIMES,
1/26/2005

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ALMOST FAMOUS

LADY SOVEREIGN

A TINY BRITISH RAPPER WITH A GIGANTIC MOUTH

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPH BY PEROU

IN HIGH SCHOOL, Lady Sovereign was a real jerk. "I was always playing tricks on people," the impish, five-foot-one London MC says with a grin. "Say someone was drinking a bottle of water? I'd pour it down their shirt. People started to hate me."

Bored with class and avoided by her peers, she found an outlet for her prankish energies in her bedroom. "I'd record raps with this cheap computer mic and put them on the Internet, e-mailing them to people and uploading them into forums," she says. Online, Sovereign's songs—honking, throbbing electronic tracks that cleverly address topics like spray-on tans and J. Lo's amply sized ass—built buzz, bypassing London's fiercely competitive rap scene. "No one would take to me on the street. I was just some little white girl trying it, and people thought I was shit." She laughs. "They still do."

One person, whose opinion matters a lot, doesn't think so. "Jay-Z flew me to New York last summer," Sovereign (born Louise Harman) says, for an impromptu audition. "Usher and [Island Def Jam Chairman] L.A. Reid were in the room, and Jay asked me to rhyme for them on the spot," she recalls. It must have gone well: She should be signed to the label by the time you read this. Currently, U.S. fans can pick up *Vertically Challenged*, a compilation of her U.K. singles, including the breakout "Cha Ching."

Sovereign, 19, admits that the odds aren't stacked in her favor for U.S. takeover—female rappers aren't taken seriously here, much less ones with foreign accents. But with a wit and flow comparable to Eminem's, she feels she has an edge. One thing she won't do, though, is take what she calls the Jessica Simpson Route. "People buy her music because she's showing off her tits." She pauses to reflect. "It wouldn't work anyway, this little midget walking around in a bikini ..."

OUT NOW *VERTICALLY CHALLENGED* CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES

ALL ABOUT ME!

NUMBER ONE ON MY CHRISTMAS LIST
I want a car. Nothing too fancy, though, because I don't have a license.

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT
My house keys, around my neck. It's like home's right there, and this way I don't lose them.

WORST PICKUP LINE I'VE EVER HEARD
In London, it's not like, "Your eyes are like the stars." Guys are just like, "Gimme your number, then?"

TRACK SUIT AND SNEAKERS BY ADIDAS

MAKEUP: GEORGINA GRAHAM FOR PEARL MANAGEMENT; HAIR: HAMILTON AT SLR USING BUMBLE + BUMBLE FOR WINDLE

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A cooling after shave from our *Pure Sport* line.

Nick Carter loves slipping the tongue to Smurfs.

DO YOU ROCK?

NICK CARTER

DOES THE FORMER PARIS HILTON BOYTOY AND CURRENT BACKSTREET BOY INDEED ... ROCK?

Ever trash a hotel room?
One time I lit candles all over the room to create a vibe. When I woke up they had melted into the carpet, causing $6,000 in damage.

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in a hotel bed?
Four.

Worst rock & roll injury?
In Europe I got hit by a rock-filled snowball someone threw onstage.

Worst tour horror story?
On my tour, I locked my friend in the bathroom, and he spilled this chemical stuff that goes in toilets all over the floor. The fumes were so bad that people had to go to the hospital.

Is there a stripper pole in your house?
No, but I can make use of anything.

Can you vomit on command?
Yep.

Ever had a gambling fixation?
Blackjack, but recently I decided to play roulette and it was great, so I kept going and lost all the money I had won. After that I was like, fuck Vegas!

How much can you bench press?
170 lbs.

Ever practice black magic?
I have a bunch of ouija boards. I'd like a room in my house filled with them.

Most decadent thing ever done?
I fly girls in to visit from all over the world. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT

PELTED WITH A ROCK-FILLED SNOWBALL? A ROOM FULL OF OUIJA BOARDS? CREATING A VIBE WITH CANDLES? NICK CARTER ROCKS BIGTIME!

BACKSTREET BOYS' ALBUM *NEVER GONE* IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP

KISS manager Doc McGhee is considering reviving the group, with the old makeup being worn by a totally new lineup. Band leader Gene Simmons is considering the idea. "When you look at original members, the Beatles are not original members," Simmons mused. "Ringo is not an original member."

BONE THUGS-N-HARMONY's Layzie Bone was assaulted at a Holiday Inn hotel by a fan angry about a canceled concert in Palm Springs, California. The assailant bit one of Bone's fingers, cutting through to the bone.

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE leader Josh Homme and the Distillers singer Brody Dalle are expecting their first child in January. The couple have also announced their engagement.

WORD!

"MAINLY FROM PORN."
CHRIS MARTIN ON INSPIRATION

"Have you tried that dolphin-friendly tuna? It's freakin' delicious!"

FLIPPY!

A DOLPHIN "SINGS" THE THEME TO *BATMAN*

HOLY CROONING WATER-based mammals! A bottlenose dolphin at Disney's Orlando, Florida, Epcot Center has been taught how to sing the theme from the 1960s television show *Batman*.

At first the intelligent creatures were encouraged to respond to rhythms broadcast underwater by waving their fins. But when an adult male was played the campy theme song, he spontaneously emitted what social science professor Heidi Harley describes as "a specific rhythm, in this case, a short sound and then a long one ... the way they sang 'Bat-maaaaaaaan.'"

Animal lovers may be interested to note that Harley is rewarding her new singing star with neither drugs nor prostitutes, but small fish. *CLARK COLLIS*

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHICH POP STAR WOULD MAKE THE BEST FEMALE PRESIDENT?

SURVEY SAYS

READER WISDOM

"COURTNEY WOULD LEGALIZE DRUGS AND GIVE US ALL FREE GAS!"
SHELLY LEEPER, CAMBRIDGE, OHIO

Log on to Blender.com for January's "BURNING QUESTION." One deserving reader will have his or her comment published in the next issue and win this **BOOST MOBILE i450.**

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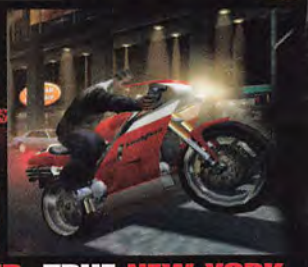

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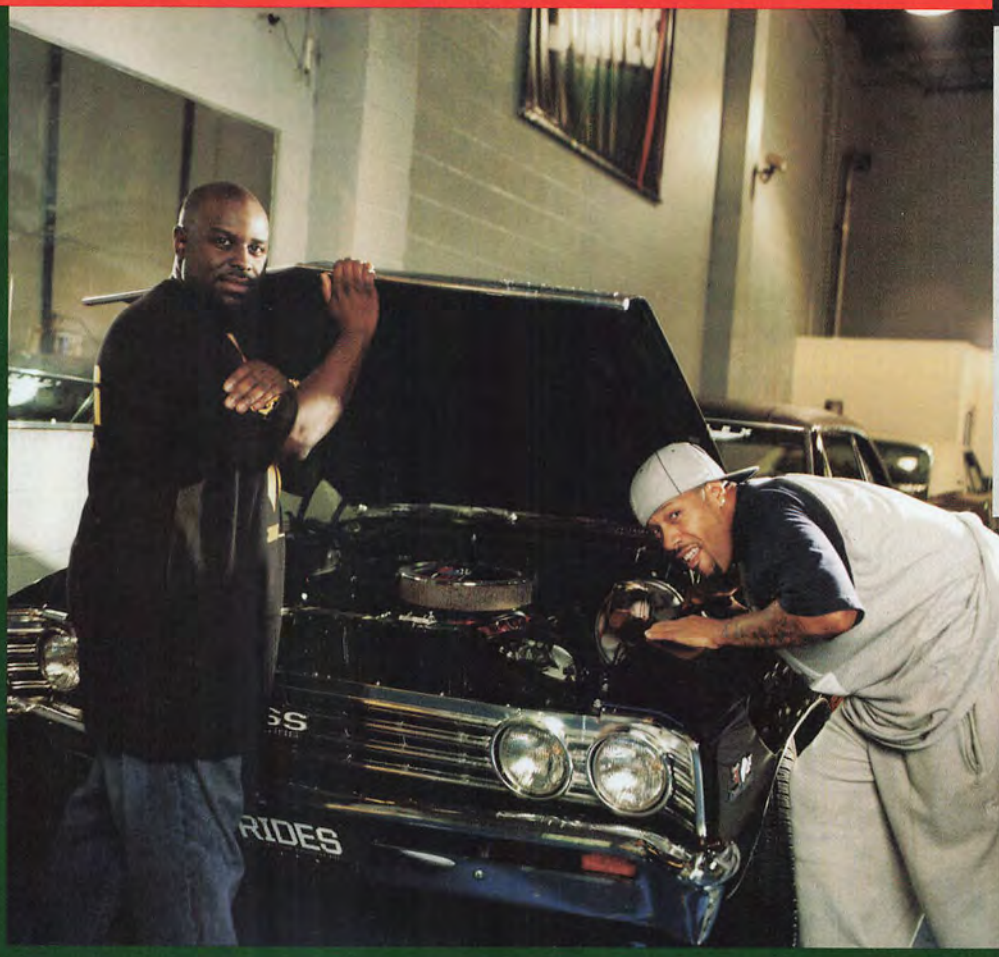
-Redman



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HOW TO... THROW A PERFECT DINNER PARTY

Portland's DANDY WARHOLS are no strangers to rock & roll decadence, so revel in—and learn from—their soirée-hosting expertise

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPH BY LEGO

1 GET ACQUAINTED

ZIA MCCABE, KEYBOARDS AND BASS: Invite 10 to 15 smart, funny, lovely people. If you don't know any, borrow from someone who does. It's good to have about a 60/40 ratio of men to women, and each person should know at least two others there. You don't want all strangers and you should have a mix of couples and singles.

2 GET INTIMATE

COURTNEY TAYLOR-TAYLOR, VOCALS AND GUITAR: Set the mood with candles or dim lights so everyone looks good. For non-obtrusive music, junkies like Stan Getz or Chet Baker work well. The table should be narrow enough to talk across without yelling. Get the best cook you know and consult a sommelier to choose good wines. Don't be frugal—cheap booze only invites drama.

3 GET COMFORTABLE

PETER HOLMSTROM, GUITAR: Don't rush through dinner—plan on being there all night. Rather than just haul out big vats of pasta, go with lots of little dishes, and space out the courses so it's not a feeding frenzy. Consolidate dishes of leftovers before bringing out new ones so people can pick off of them and the table doesn't get too cluttered.

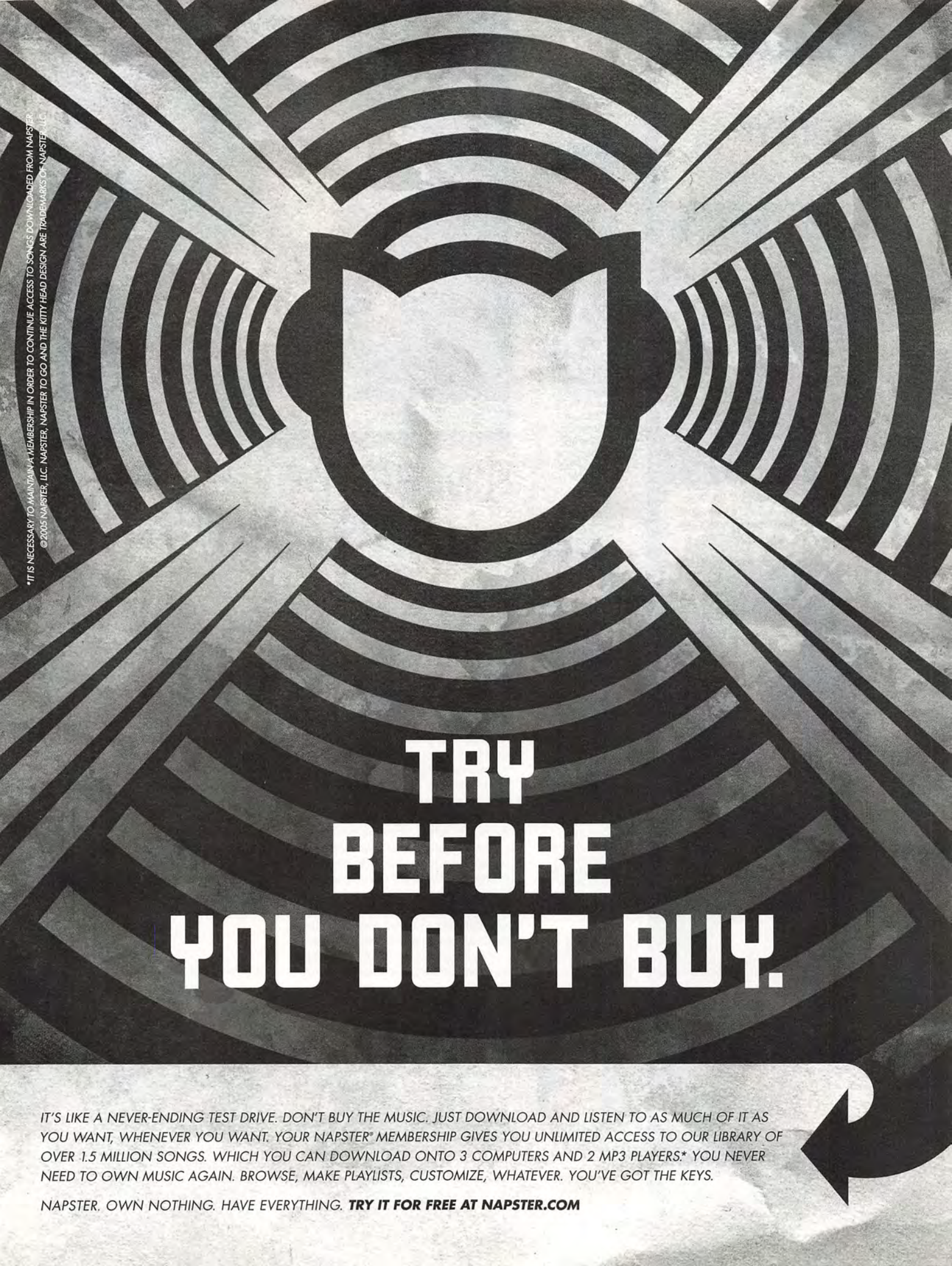
4 GET MOVIN'

BRENT DE BOER, DRUMS: Once dinner is winding down, guests should move two to four seats to their left. This "resets" the party, providing everyone with fresh scenery and new people to talk to. Carry your own glass with you when you move, and please, tidy your station before you get up. Once the sun is up, it's time to get your butt home. Save your drugs. Find someone to pay for it.

DANDY WARHOLS' NEW ALBUM, *ODDITORIUM, OR WARLORDS OF MARS (CAPITOL)*, IS OUT NOW.

Dandy Warhols, photographed at Strip House, NYC (from left): Courtney Taylor-Taylor, Brent de Boer, Zia McCabe, Peter Holmstrom.

GROOMING: ANDI BYRNE. PHOTOGRAPHED AT STRIP HOUSE, 13 E. 12TH ST., NY, NY. 212-328-0000. WWW.GLAZIERGROUP.COM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LOOGEY!

DRUG DEVOTEE PETE DOHERTY DEFENDS HIS WOMAN, GROSSES OUT CAMERAMAN

Paparazzi follow Doherty the day after photos of his girlfriend Kate Moss snorting cocaine off his Babyshambles CD appeared in a U.K. newspaper.

Upon seeing the photographer, the drug-addled singer collects mucus from his throat, puckers his lips ...

... and spits the wad at the camera.

NEWS ROUNDUP

SYSTEM OF A DOWN singer Serj Tankian has visited the office of Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Illinois) to try to convince him to bring the Armenian Genocide Resolution, which would officially recognize Turkey's slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1923, to a vote. Tankian promised his 97-year-old grandfather that he would publicize the cause.

KEITH RICHARDS says he is still undecided about playing Johnny Depp's father in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequel. He spent a day with Depp on the film set but says, "The idea of working for Disney gives me the shivers."

Following the appearance of quotations from Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest*, on the sleeve of their recent album, *Make Believe*, WEEZER guitarist Brian Bell has fueled further speculation that the band might split, saying, "We have no idea if we're going to be in a band next year."

WORD!

"SOME DAYS WE DON'T TALK."

OZZY OSBOURNE ON HIS MARRIAGE

Paris: "That's hot. No, really, I'm schvitzing."

IN THE STUDIO

"I'M BEST AT SINGING"

PARIS HILTON RECORDS HER "PRINCESS HIP-POP" DEBUT

"I'M A BRAND; I do everything," says 24-year-old Paris Hilton, sitting on a sofa at the Warner Bros. Burbank office. "But I'm best at singing."

The fledgling, fiancé-free pop star put aside myriad celebrity duties to make her debut CD—a collection of club-friendly songs featuring Snoop Dogg, Jadakiss and Fat Joe due early 2006—her No. 1 priority. After first experimenting with a "more rock sound" two years ago, Hilton finally found her musical soulmate in A-list producer Scott Storch (Fat Joe's "Lean Back" and 50 Cent's "Candy Shop") and the two insta (but "platonic") friends tapped into a genre the heiress calls "princess hip-pop."

Possible single "Turn It Up" is reminiscent of Gwen Stefani's hip-hop/new wave amalgams. "It's about turning up your sexuality, knowing you're sexy, dancing on tables, popping Cristal," Hilton says. Her lyric "Gonna lose my clothes/You like that, dontcha?" lends an autobiographical twist.

"Jealousy" was inspired by former best friend and *Simple Life* partner in crime Nicole Richie. "I don't even know what is happening with us," she says, clouds moving across her eyes. "I hope she doesn't get mad when she hears it."

As her unmixed music plays on the gargantuan sound system, Hilton shakes her shoulders and thumb-punches her Sidekick. *Blender* leans forward and whispers in her diamond-studded ear that her voice is better than expected. "Everyone says that," she replies in a pleasant, Snuggle-the-fabric-softener-bear voice before returning to her text messaging.

Bollywood-flavored "Are You Wit It" features strings. Though Hilton knows how to play violin, she opted to hire out. "I'm not going to be onstage playing violin. That would be gay." *VICTORIA DE SILVERIO*

ALL ABOUT MY RECORD

ARTIST Paris Hilton

PRODUCER Scott Storch

STUDIO Hit Factory, Miami

NEW ALBUM Untitled, early 2006

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

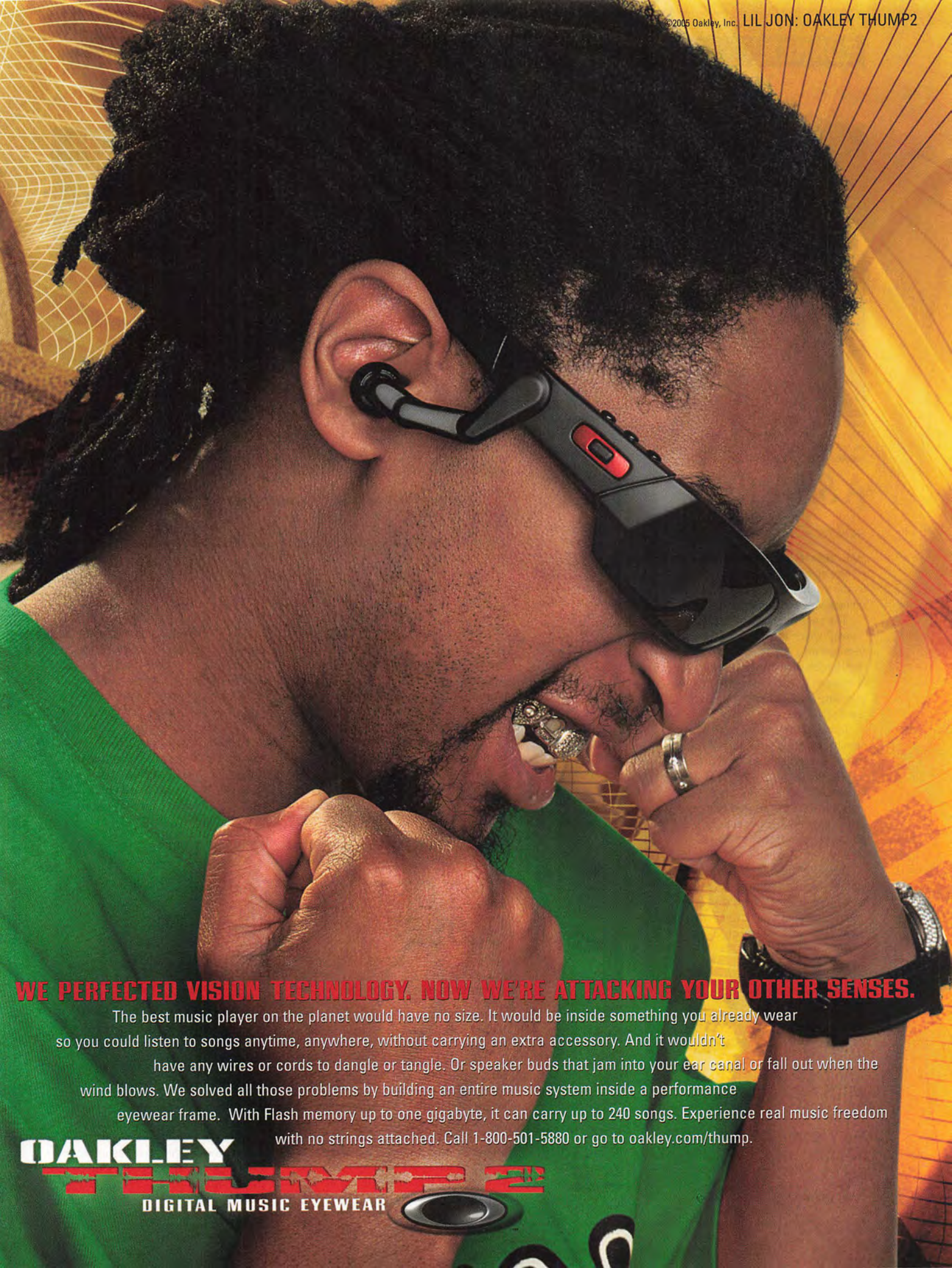
Godfather of mope MORRISSEY is working on his eighth solo record, *Ringleader of the Tormentors*, in a studio in Rome beneath a 17th-century church.

Indie darlings THE SHINS are recording their third album at singer James Mercer's Albuquerque home studio with Phil Ek, their producer on 2003's *Chutes Too Narrow*.

Experimental turntablist DJ SHADOW is putting the final touches on his follow-up to 2002's *The Private Press* at Chung King Studios in New York City.

Art-punk trio YEAH YEAH YEAHS are working on their sophomore release, the follow-up to 2003's *Fever to Tell*, at a studio in Brooklyn with producer Sam Spiegel.

DOHERTY: SPLASH NEWS; HILTON: IAN BROOK; OSBOURNE: LAWRENCE LUCIER/FILMMAGIC.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH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Madonna: This month she's French.

A *SHANDE*!

MADONNA TO RECEIVE "PUNISHMENT FROM THE HEAVENS," SAY RABBIS

MADONNA HAS COME under fire over a song on her new album, which has leaders of her adopted faith threatening divine retribution.

The controversial track, titled "Isaac," which appears on *Confessions on a Dance Floor*, the pop matriarch's eleventh studio album, is a paean to Rabbi Isaac Luria, a founding father of Kabbalah from the 16th century.

Rabbi Rafael Cohen, head of a seminary named after Luria, told an Israeli newspaper that "Jewish law forbids the use of the name of the holy rabbi for profit. Her act is just simply unacceptable, and I can only sympathize for her because of the punishment that she is going to receive from the heavens."

A rep for the singer had no comment on the supposed damnation, but did note, "There's no question that people who have heard [the song] put it on the level of 'Like a Prayer' and 'Ray of Light.'"

JOHANNA PIAZZA

TELL US A JOKE!

WHY DON'T RABBITS MAKE NOISE WHEN THEY HAVE SEX?

THEY HAVE COTTON BALLS.

RYAN CABRERA

NEWS ROUNDUP

The musical LENNON, which featured the close involvement of Yoko Ono, announced its Broadway closure following a similarly unsuccessful run in San Francisco.

NIRVANA's 1991 album *Nevermind* was voted the "most overrated album in the world … ever!" in a poll at U.K. radio station BBC 6 Music.

Canadian rockers the Wyrd Sisters are suing Warner Bros., PULP 's Jarvis Cocker and RADIOHEAD's Phil Selway and Jonny Greenwood over a scene in the forthcoming film *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* that allegedly features a band called the Wyrd Sisters. Cocker, Selway and Greenwood portray the band in the movie.

WORD!

"I COULDN'T GIVE A FUCK IF THIS ONE BOMBS."

PINK ON HER UPCOMING RECORD

LIFE AFTER ROCK

Then: Reeling in groupies.

Now: Reeling in fish.

NED "HOAKY" HICKEL

THEN

BASS PLAYER WITH DASH RIP ROCK
1984–1999

"AS A BAND WE accomplished what we wanted to, plus Bill [Davis, singer] moved to Tennessee. The worst part was traveling and the best part was playing. Although when we had a chance to go to Europe every summer, especially Scandinavia and the Russian border, the venues were really horrible sometimes. When it stopped being fun, it was time to quit. I didn't want to be 40 years old, playing in a Holiday Inn in Minneapolis."

NOW

MARINE SURVEYOR, MIAMI
1999–PRESENT

"I GREW UP ON boats and I always wanted to be a fishing boat captain. But after about six months, I knew it wasn't my can of worms. So I took a course for surveying boats, joined the society and hung my shingle out, like a doctor or lawyer. I used to think I couldn't live without applause, but I'm really happy. I've got my health and I'm pursuing my dreams in the Caribbean. I just went to the Bahamas for two weeks. I go to bed when I used to get up! It's wonderful." *AS TOLD TO RONNIE DANNELLEY*

OUT OF THE CLOSET

BRITNEY SPEARS AUCTIONS SWEAT-STAINED SHOES AND OTHER STUFF FOR HURRICANE KATRINA CHARITY

BRITNEY SPEARS WILL TAKE the bra right off her back to benefit the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The pop diva and new mommy is auctioning off more than 100 of her personal effects on eBay to raise money for the Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund.

Though Spears tried to include old panties and a jewel-encrusted bra, the intimates were taken off the site due to eBay's policy against selling used underwear. Among the allowed items were a sectional couch, barstools, a swimsuit, a file cabinet and a pair of size 9 1/2 blue rubber flip-flops sporting the sweat prints of her feet.

A maternity shirt that Spears wore while pregnant with Sean Preston Federline, born September 14, went for $1,200. *JOHANNA PIAZZA*

Britney's flip-flops: They'll look great on our mantelpiece!

MADONNA: SPLASH NEWS; HICKEL (LEFT): MICHAELOCHSARCHIVES.COM; HICKEL (RIGHT): COURTESY NED HICKEL; SANDALS: SPLASH NEWS; PINK: LAWRENCE LUCIER/FILMMAGIC.COM; ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH; CABRERA: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE.COM

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GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF

WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

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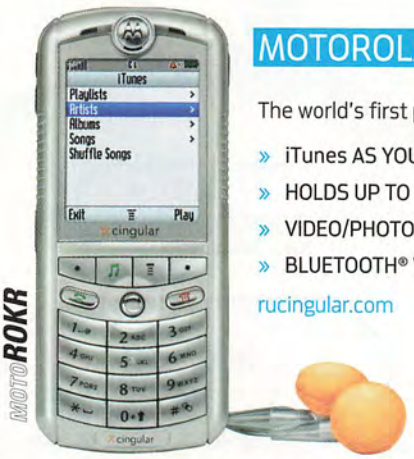

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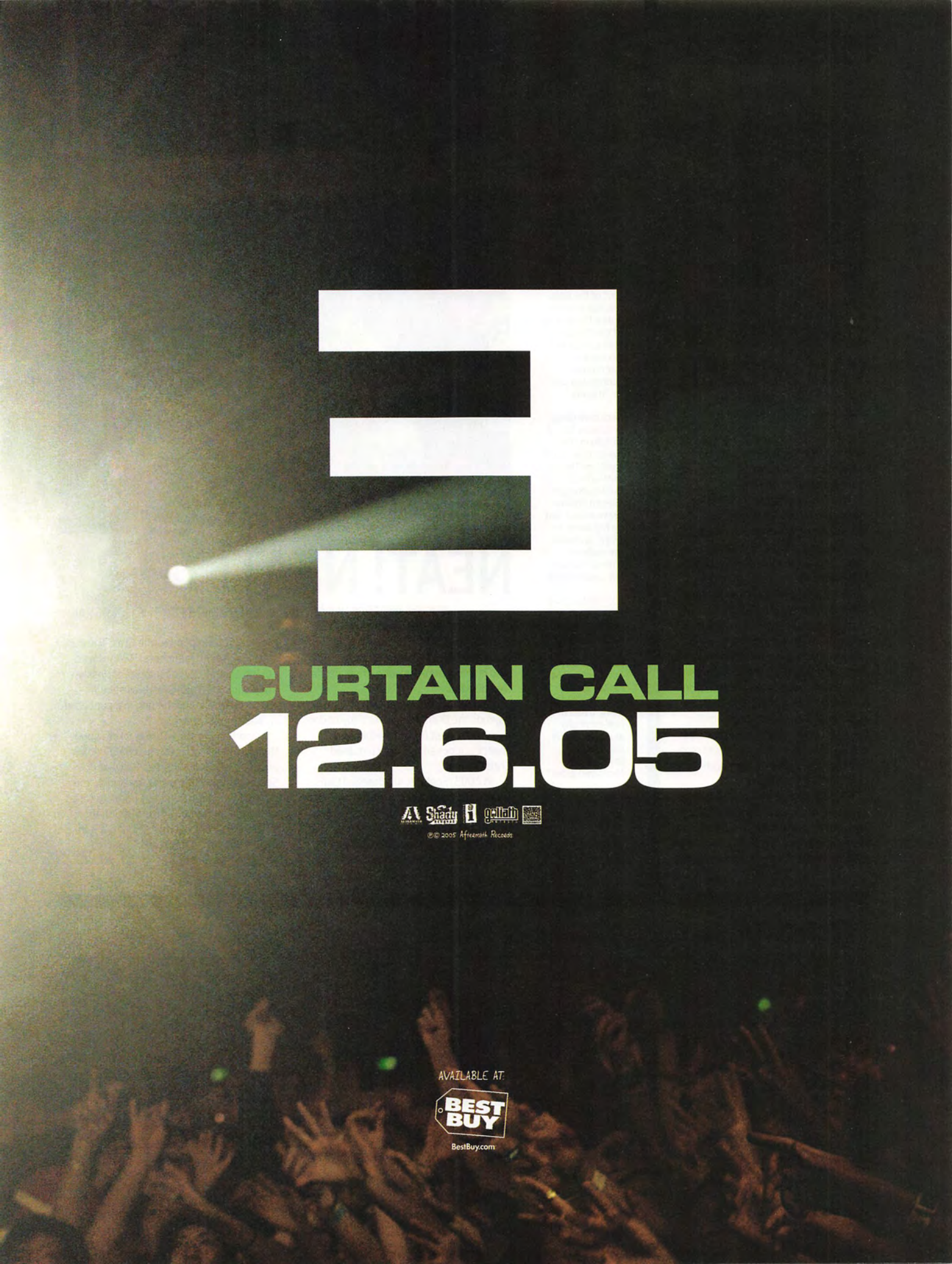
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Van Morrison: "And this next one is *also* about cocaine!"

VAN WILDER

BATSHIT-CRAZY DEMOS HAUNT LEGENDARY IRISH CROONER

THOUGH HIS CATALOGUE is peppered with hits like "Brown Eyed Girl" and "Moondance," Van Morrison has some recordings he'd rather forget.

In 1967, in order to fulfill his contentious contract with Bang Records, the pissed-off blues rocker rebelled by knocking out a flurry of throwaway songs in a single recording session in New York City.

Popularly referred to as the Bang Records Sessions, the 31 improvised tracks range in length from 48 to 90 seconds and include such titles as "Blow in Your Nose," "Nose in Your Blow" and "Want a Danish." All of the recordings consist solely of Morrison randomly wailing and talking over an acoustic guitar. Some songs employ the exact same melody, while others contain nonsense lyrics, best exemplified by "chicka-chicka-chicka, chicka-cho" on "Chicken Coo."

The 38-minute session, which has appeared on compilations and bootlegs, is now available in its entirety on the blog of wfmu.org, New Jersey radio station WFMU's website. *TONY MCMENAMIN*

NEWS ROUNDUP

CAM'RON is suing R. Kelly for allegedly taking sole credit for a song the pair created together. The rapper's suit claims he wrote part of the introduction and the entire third verse of the "Snake" remix. A spokesperson for Cam'ron described the pair as "friends."

Reclusive singer **ENYA** was forced to hide in the panic room of her castle on the outskirts of Dublin after an alleged stalker broke in and tied up her maid. In 1996, an Italian fan stabbed himself outside her parents' pub.

LIL' KIM has told fans she is "in good spirits" behind bars at the Philadelphia Federal Detention Center. The rapper denied rumors she was being treated preferentially and said, "Each day, I read, sharpen my focus and grow."

Rat Scabies would very much like you to let go of his testicles.

NEAT! NEAT!

THE DAMNED DRUMMER RAT SCABIES HUNTS FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

MANY HAVE SEARCHED for the Holy Grail, but Rat Scabies is the first treasure hunter who is also a punk rocker named after a skin disease.

The former drummer with U.K. punk legends the Damned has recently undertaken the quest for the mythical cup, a chalice supposed to have contained Christ's blood.

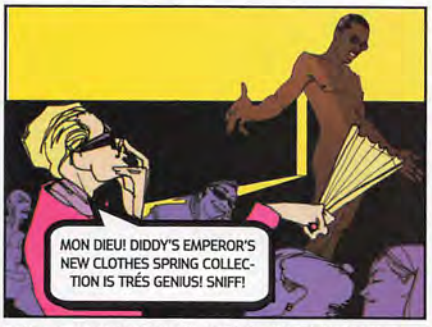
In 2003, Scabies, 48, dragged Chris Dawes, his West London next-door neighbor, into his lifelong obsession. The pair traveled around Europe, chasing various leads, focusing on the French village of Rennes-le-Château, where some believe the Knights Templar hid the Grail. The pair, however, had little success. "When I was poking about in the basement of Rosslyn Chapel [in Scotland]," Scabies said, "I found a metallic cup, hidden in a cupboard … and I put it back."

Upon their return, Dawes wrote about their journeys and published *Rat Scabies and the Holy Grail* this year. So what does Scabies think of the other Grail book, the 36-million-selling *Da Vinci Code*? He tore up a copy throughout their mission to make filters for his joints. "I just put it in the perspective it deserved," Scabies shrugged. *STEVE LOWE*

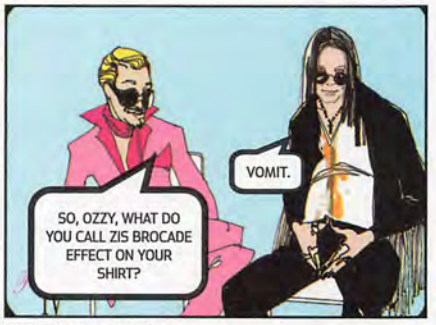
POP HISTORY 1986 – 2007 // HOW MUSICIANS BECAME FASHION DESIGNERS

Fashionista Monthly
ZIS, HOW YOU SAY, SNEAKER COULD BE THE, HOW YOU SAY, NEXT BIG THING!
I THINK YOU SHOULD LAY OFF THE, HOW YOU SAY, YAYO.

The lucrative possibilities of musicians selling fashion first became clear in the wake of Run-D.M.C.'s "My Adidas," although not everyone is convinced.



In time, every star from Gwen Stefani to Diddy becomes a clothes-designing fashion icon.



Well, *almost* everyone …

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS // ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

MORRISON: DEZO HOFFMAN/REX USA; SCABIES: IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD.

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20 SONGS YOU SHOULD DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 THE GAME AND DR. DRE
"HERE WE GO AGAIN" *[MIXTAPE]*
Compton's answer to Gilligan and the Skipper keep the beef alive with G-Unit disses and a beat like shattering glass.

2 THE VERONICAS
"4EVER" *SIRE*
Grab your hairbrush microphone: Australia's Max Martin–approved twinlets are ready to rock!

3 BLINK-182
"ANOTHER GIRL, ANOTHER PLANET" *GEFFEN*
The princes of pop-punk take a break from lighting their farts to tackle this 1977 classic.

4 THE CRIBS
"HEY SCENESTERS!" *WICHITA*
England's newest Franzabees call out copycat fashionistas over a devastating riff.

5 KANYE WEST FEAT. TALIB KWELI, Q-TIP, COMMON AND RHYMEFEST
"WE CAN MAKE IT BETTER" *ROC-A-FELLA*
This Japanese bonus track is vintage 'Ye: funny one-liners, a classic soul hook and a bunch of rappers less talented than he is.

6 NATALIA Y LA FORQUETINA
"SER HUMANO" *SONY DISCOS*
Rousing garage rock from a 21-year-old Mexican phenom. Like Kelly Clarkson *en español*.

7 LOLA
"NO STRINGS" *SOBE/WARNER BROS.*
Starts out like a standard R&B love jam, ends up a horndog plea for anonymous "real good sex."

8 MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
"ASTRO ZOMBIES" *VAGRANT*
New Jersey's finest screamers glam up an old Misfits joint about face-melting undead rapists from outer space.

9 ANNIE
"GIMME YOUR MONEY" *IK7*
Norway's dancefloor pixie plays gold-digger on this drum-heavy creeper from her new mix CD.

10 CHRIS BROWN FEAT. JUELZ SANTANA
"RUN IT" *JIVE*
A Scott Storch–produced hookup jam from a Virginia newcomer who's way freakier than any 16-year-old has a right to be.

11 JUELZ SANTANA
"CLOCKWORK" *DEF JAM*
Just when you thought hip-hop was out of booty-shaking metaphors, this Harlem hero comes up with another.

SONG OF THE MONTH!

12 BUSTA RHYMES
"TOUCH IT" *AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE*
Busta takes a sample from Daft Punk—a computer voice from "Technologic"—and a tip from Nirvana, alternating dazzlingly between soft and loud flows.

13 ROBBIE FULKS
"FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE HOTLINE" *YEP ROC*
Alt-country prankster pays tribute to the NYC popmeisters' winning formula with a cheeky 1-800 sendup.

14 JUNIOR SENIOR
"TAKE MY TIME" *CUTTING EDGE*
In hindsight it was inevitable: Denmark's half-gay duo team up with the ladies of the B-52's for a disco-funk bonanza.

15 CAM'RON
"GIRLS CASH CARS" *ASYLUM/WMG*
Over a typically apocalyptic Dipset beat, Cam holds forth on three subjects hip-hop has ignored for far too long.

16 HOLLERTRONIX
"TIPPIN' TOXIC" *(ONLINE)*
Mike Jones and Britney Spears get it on in an airplane bathroom on this fantastic mash-up.

17 THE DARKNESS
"ONE WAY TICKET" *ATLANTIC*
England's catsuited rock howlers make a hellish cocaine trip sound like a hell of a party.

18 THE LOVEMAKERS
"PREPARE FOR THE FIGHT" *CHERRYTREE/INTERSCOPE*
Duran Duran goes co-ed on this soaring synth epic from Oakland, California's ickily named trio.

19 PURPLE RIBBON ALL-STARS
"KRYPTONITE" *PURPLE RIBBON/VIRGIN*
A purp-sipping mixtape hit from Outkast's Big Boi and his ATL crew. Andre who thousand?

20 HEY WILLPOWER
"HUNDREDAIRE" *COCHON*
Pasty indie-rock refugee Will Schwartz sets his laptop to "1972" for an irresistibly fizzy pop gem.

Busta's clothing line is still trying to work out a few kinks.

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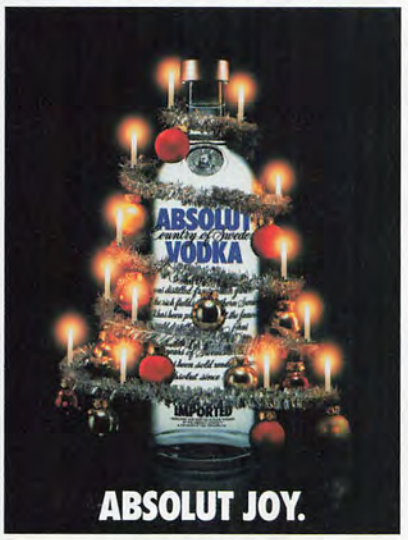

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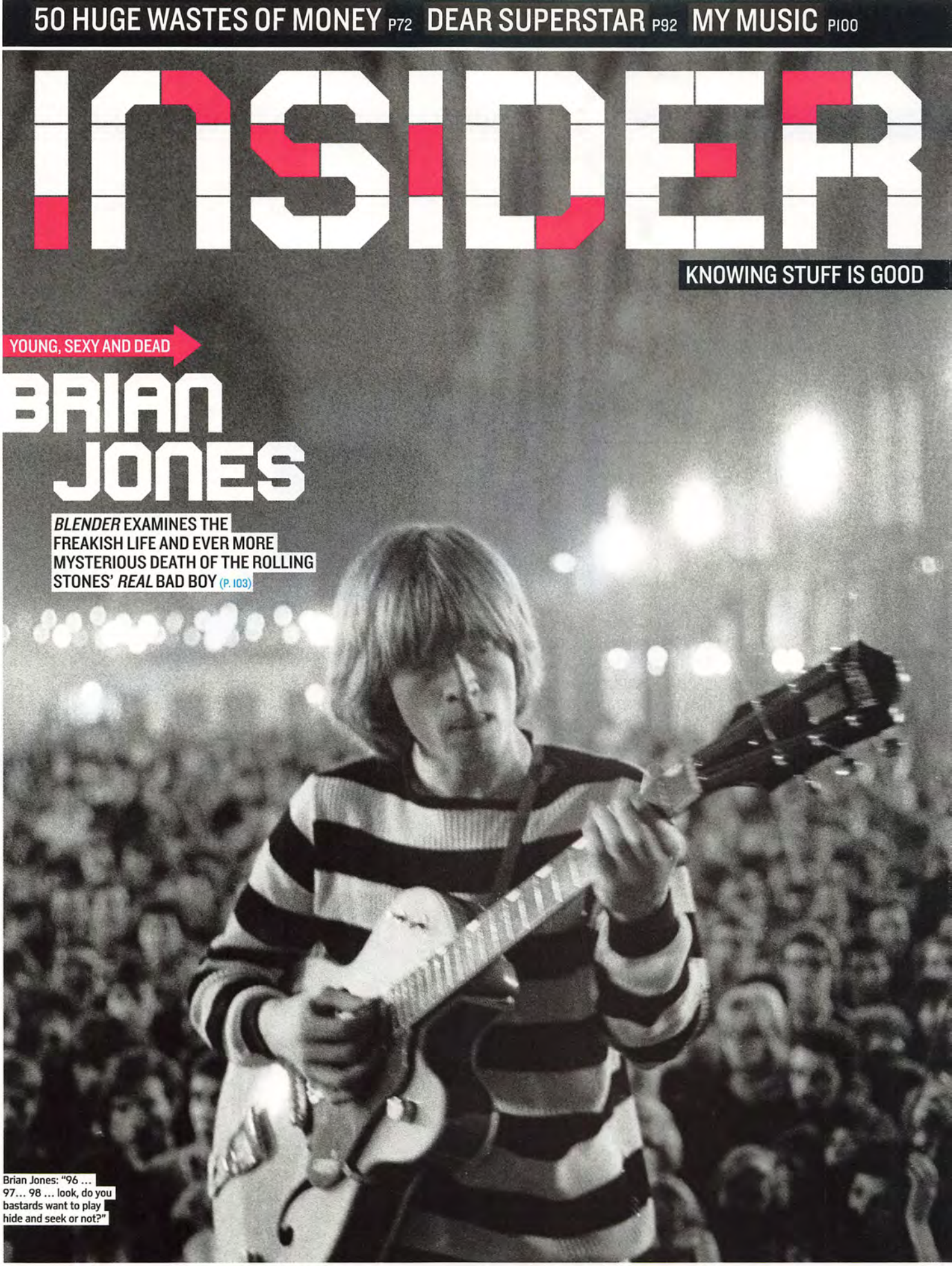
INSIDER

KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD

YOUNG, SEXY AND DEAD

BRIAN JONES

BLENDER EXAMINES THE FREAKISH LIFE AND EVER MORE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF THE ROLLING STONES' *REAL* BAD BOY (P. 103)



Brian Jones: "96 ... 97... 98 ... look, do you bastards want to play hide and seek or not?"

JOHN HOPKINS/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD.

"MY HAT FLIES FIRST CLASS!"

... AT LEAST IT DOES IF YOU'RE THE LEAD SINGER OF U2. BUT BONO'S SPLURGING IS JUST THE TIP OF THE ROCK-SPENDING ICEBERG. IN FACT, AN ICEBERG IS ABOUT THE ONLY STUPID THING NEVER BOUGHT BY A PROFLIGATE STAR, AS *BLENDER*'S LIST OF THE 50 DUMBEST ROCK-STAR PURCHASES DEFINITIVELY PROVES >

BY ERIC ALT, CLARK COLLIS, JOSH EELLS, RUPERT HOWE, STEVE KANDELL, BEN MITCHELL, PETER RUBIN, JAMES SLAUGHTER, GABE SORIA, JONAH WEINER AND PIPER WEISS

EDITED BY ROBERT LA FRANCO

KEVIN MAZUR/LFI; OPPOSITE: PETER ANDERSON/S.I.N./CORBIS

50
RAP SHEET
DMX
Item: FREEDOM
Cost: $1,000

It may seem steep, but a thousand-buck fine was a bargain compared to the jail sentence the rapper faced after being charged with smashing his SUV through a security gate at New York's JFK Airport. While high on Valium. And impersonating a federal agent. If only he hadn't been arrested a mere week later for doing 104 in a 65 zone ...

49
PLATINUM SPOKES
CHRIS KIRKPATRICK
Item: WHEEL SPINNERS
Cost: $40,000

While Lance Bass spent his time and money trying to become the first member of a boy band in space, fellow 'N Syncer Kirkpatrick decided to invest his money more practically: on a set of platinum-plated wheel spinners for his Cadillac Escalade.

48
HE GOT GAME
JERMAINE DUPRI
Item: VIDEOGAMES
Cost: $12,000

JD apparently ascribes to the age-old adage "You can never be too rich, too thin or own too many PS2s." Because really, when you're a multimillionaire rap mogul who's sleeping with Janet Jackson, what better way to unwind than with a few hours of *Crash Bandicoot 3*?

47
EXPRESS DELIVERY
KEITH MOON
Item: CUSTOMIZED MILK TRUCK
Cost: $595

In 1971, Who drummer Keith Moon bought a British electric-powered milk delivery cart and had it converted into a "mobile Victorian parlour"—with armchair, wallpaper, cocktail cabinet and gramophone. To fit it in his garage, Moon also removed his Corvette and drove it into a nearby hedge.

46
SCISSOR SISTER
BRITNEY SPEARS
Item: SHEARS
Cost: $3,000

When Mrs. Federline gets her locks trimmed, not just any scissors will do. The new mama opts for a set of custom-ordered clippers, handmade and imported from Japan for a whopping 3 G's—or roughly the cost of 40 Flowbees. It's a far cry from the Supercuts in Kentwood, La.

45
BED BUGGIN'
JESSICA SIMPSON
Item: BEDSHEETS
Cost: $1,400

"I don't sleep good," was how Simpson chose to defend shelling out a grand and a half for a set of Egyptian-cotton bed linens. When they were almost ruined in the wash, husband Nick Lachey had an explanation of his own: "Even the washing machine thinks $1,400 sheets are fucking ridiculous," he said.

44
POPPER GUN
JOHN POPPER
Item: CIVIL WAR CANNON
Cost: $10,000

Popper, the once-hefty frontman for chooglers Blues Traveler, is known to be an enthusiastic endorser of the right to bear arms. In addition to the working Civil War–era cannon, he owns some 80 guns and a collection of daggers and samurai swords.

43
HOME MOVIES
RUSSELL SIMMONS
Item: MOVIE THEATER
Cost: $2,000,000

The Def Jam/Phat Farm mogul is such a cinephile, he had a theater installed in the basement of his New Jersey house. And not just a couple of La-Z-Boys and a video projector: Simmons's home theater has a Loews marquee, a popcorn machine *and* a ticket booth.

42
HUMPIN' AROUND
BOBBY BROWN
Item: CHILD SUPPORT
Cost: $63,500

In March 2004, Brown was released from a 60-day jail term in Georgia ... so he could stand trial in Massachusetts for failure to pay child support. The good news? He spent only a day in jail by ponying up the delinquent back payments. The bad news? He then had to go back to Georgia to face another set of charges.

41
METAL MOLARS
NAS AND KELIS
Item: HIS 'N' HERS GOLD GRILLS
Cost: $36,000

Love means never being without matching gold teeth, if you're hip-hop's newest newlyweds (his read 'Nasty,' hers 'Tasty'). Kelis's family did insist they remove their grills at last January's nuptials—presumably allowing the photographer to take pictures without fear of going blind.

40
EMPIRE BUILDING
JOHN MAYER
Item: BOBA FETT ACTION FIGURE
Cost: $1,719.15

In 2004 the mint-condition miniaturized bounty hunter was an impulse buy on eBay—where Mayer also gets his shoes—at a time when the unrepentant singer-songwriter also admitted to having spent $1,500 on phone sex in four months.

39
H.O.V.A. CRAFT
JAY-Z
Item: MERCEDES MAYBACH
Cost: $360,000

Not so much a car as a spirited attempt to see how many optional extras you can cram on four wheels, Jay-Z's top-line Maybach features an electro-transparent panoramic glass roof, reclining seats with massage function, a DVD player, a 21-speaker hi-fi, an "interphone" and, most vital of all, two cup holders.

38
PATIENTS WEARING THIN
KURT COBAIN
Item: DRUG TREATMENT
Cost: $40,000

Cobain might have started using to help relieve his lifelong stomach troubles, but his troubles with Mr. Brownstone led to two prematurely ended rehab stints in 1992—one at L.A.'s pricey Exodus Recovery Center and one at Cedars-Sinai (when he also passed out during his daughter's birth)—and some of his mopiest facial expressions.

37
SHOE FLY
USHER
Item: SNEAKERS
Cost: $26,000

We're sure R&B's answer to Imelda Marcos had a good reason for copping the equivalent of 365 days' worth of Air Force Ones; after all, simulated onstage sex can really scuff up a pair of kicks. Maybe next time he should also think about investing in a wardrobe of T-shirts that don't rip quite so easily ...

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36

CAFFEINE JUNKIE

TOMMY LEE

Item: A STARBUCKS FRANCHISE

Cost: $4,000

Mötley Crüe drummer and erstwhile porn movie star Tommy Lee's 1999 purchase of a Starbucks might have seemed a sound investment for those post-rock years, but his financial strategy had one very major drawback: zero paying customers. Why? The replica café was built in his house as a gift for then-wife Pamela Anderson.

35

AY DIABLO!

JAY KAY

Item: LAMBORGHINI DIABLO SE30

Cost: $306,000

The Jamiroquai frontman, an avid exotic-car collector, bought this rare (only 150 were made) "anniversary edition" jewel, shipping it from the U.S. to England so it could appear in the video for "Cosmic Girl." Too bad the car's handler took it for a joyride and smashed it up beyond repair.

34

ARE YOU GONNA PAY MY WAY?

LENNY KRAVITZ

Item: BOOZY NIGHT OUT WITH LIONEL RICHIE

Cost: $20,400

In late 2004, Kravitz, Richie and 30 close friends took over London's Kaberet's Prophecy bar for three hours of dropping $1,190 on magnums of frankly overpriced Cristal. Richie enjoyed a little bop to "Dancing on the Ceiling" and the K Man was good enough to pick up the tab.

33

BABY LOVE

MARIAH CAREY

Item: MARILYN MONROE'S PIANO

Cost: $662,500

When Christie's auctioned off Marilyn Monroe's possessions in October 1999, the third-priciest item turned out to be the icon's white baby grand, bought by an anonymous buyer—who turned out to be fellow vixen Ms. Carey herself, who installed it in her Tribeca penthouse.

32

HEIL! HEIL! ROCK & ROLL!

LEMMY KILMISTER

Item: LUFTWAFFE SWORD

Cost: $6,000

Born in 1945, Motörhead frontman Lemmy is fascinated with World War II. This rare sword is the prized piece in his extensive collection of memorabilia and has doubled in value since he acquired it. "It's a very good investment," reasons Lemmy, who says that he has no admiration for any Nazis except Hermann Goering.

P. Diddy: "Didn't you used to be taller, Fonsworth?"

31

JUSTIFIED EXPENDITURE

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Item: HARRODS SHOPPING SPREE

Cost: $1,700,000

Wanting to beat the crowds to buy Christmas presents in 2003, Timberlake had the exclusive London department store open especially for him and 80 close friends. His purchases, including a remote-control toy Mercedes and jewelry for Cameron Diaz, were transported away in two rented buses.

30

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

PAUL MCCARTNEY

Item: GIGANTIC FENCE

Cost: $170,000

Herds of wild boar were becoming a problem on McCartney's 1,000-acre English estate, tearing up trees and carrying swine fever. But he didn't want the guilt of the pests being shot on his property, so in 1999 he had a four-mile long fence built to keep them out. "He does whatever he wants because he can afford it," said a disgruntled local farmer.

29

REAL FIR

STING

Item: CHRISTMAS TREE

Cost: $11,900

A man who has done so much for the plight of the rainforests could hardly hack down one of his wooden friends just for holiday decoration. So in 2002, Sting had a special living Christmas tree brought into his 41-room English mansion, hiring a top-flight florist at additional expense to give the festive centerpiece a lavish makeover.

28

HELLO SAILOR

P. DIDDY

Item: YACHT RENTAL

Cost: $800,000

Even by the standards of a man who employed Fonsworth Bentley, Diddy's choice of transport for his Summer 2003 holiday in the Mediterranean seemed sightly *de trop*: a 181-foot luxury yacht, rented at a cost of $40,000 per day, with its own gym, gold-plated taps in the Jacuzzis and, most vitally, a helicopter pad.

LEE: JUSTIN STEPHENS; DIDDY: SIPA PRESS

ROCK STAR D.I.Y. WITH CONVERSE® ONE™

Whether you scribbled your name, swapped out your laces or sketched your favorite band's logo, surely you grew up personalizing your sneakers. With the new Converse One website, sneaker fans can customize their favorite classic, be it Chuck Taylor® All Star®, Jack Purcell® or One Star®. *Blender*'s editors recently logged on to personalize Converse styles inspired by the music they love – check out the rock star styles they'll be wearing this holiday season!

Log onto: www.converseone.com where you can choose from various colors and prints and customize all areas of the shoe. Design your own or create a pair for the rock star on your list!

A

CLARK COLLIS
SENIOR WRITER
"When I came up with the idea for my Converse sneakers I was listening to the Drive By Truckers because that's the only CD I had with me in the flotation tank where I do all my apparel-designing."

B

JONAH WEINER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
"I wanted to capture the whimsy of the Diplomats, the exuberance of Avril Lavigne, and the thrills of big-game hunting in the African wild."

C

BILLY SORRENTINO
DESIGNER
"I grew up going to punk rock and hardcore shows. Black Purcell's and Cons were the shoes of choice."

D

IAN WHEELER-NICHOLSON
COPY CHIEF
"Clearly, the contrasting colors of my Chuck Taylor high-tops express my love of different forms of music, from Mozart to the Meat Puppets."

E

JENNIFER SAMPLE
MANAGING EDITOR
"My inspiration was my niece Amelia and her love of female singers! Well, actually... it was *my* love of female pop stars!"

F

ELLEN CARPENTER
RESEARCH EDITOR
"I love unabashedly poppy rock music–like the Muckrakers and The New Pornographers – and I think my shoes, with their bright colors and fun, energetic design, reflect that."

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MONEY TO BURN

HARVEY GETTLESON, PARTNER AT GETTLESON, WITZER & CO., MANAGES THE FINANCES OF 12 OF THE *FORBES* TOP 100 RICHEST ENTERTAINERS. HERE HE DISPENSES ADVICE ON HOW TO GET ON THE LIST, AND HOW TO STAY THERE

OK. I'M A NEW ROCK BRAT ON THE BLOCK. INVEST MY FIRST $20 MILLION FOR ME.

First, I'll buy you a house that's good for two to three years. Next I'll get you a nice car. Then I'll establish a solid wealth accumulation portfolio because I've seen it before—you have $20 million now but the public may decide to retire you next year. Only when I've done that will I let you open your bar or hotel. My clients' millions come to me. And then I give them some to spend.

WHAT'S THE MOST DUMB-ASS ROCK STAR INVESTMENT YOU'VE SEEN?

It usually involves a family member. A nephew who wants to open a bar. A brother who wants to open a shrimp joint. I said you might as well put the money in a sack and throw it in the ocean.

DO DRINK AND DRUGS COUNT AS "INVESTMENTS"?

Some bands would do well to buy their own distillery. I handled the money for the British band Happy Mondays. One night I got a call at 3 A.M. from a hotel in Washington, D.C. The band wanted to drink and the hotel manager demanded a fully loaded American Express card to cover it. They didn't just want a nightcap. They wanted a lot to drink.

IN TERMS OF BRAND CREDIBILITY, ISN'T IT GOOD FOR ROCK STARS TO BE FINANCIAL MORONS?

Well, yes, you can argue that if the Who hadn't smashed up their guitars and wrecked places, they would have devalued their image. But as a business manager I have to ensure they don't smash up too much stuff. You've got to be sensible about destruction.

HOW DO YOU TELL A RICH GUY HE'S BROKE?

Someone should say, OK, we have to downsize a house or two. Or: Give me the keys to the Ferrari and go get a Prius.

STING DIDN'T NOTICE HIS ACCOUNTANT STEALING MILLIONS. WAS HE AN IDIOT?

No. I have sympathy for him because it's easy to lose millions. These guys have a lot of money; they can't possibly be expected to know where it all is.

MICHAEL ODELL

[50 ROCK EXTRAVAGANCES]

27
THE JOY OF WRECKS

BILLY IDOL

Item: HOTEL VANDALISM

Cost: $20,400

Possibly bored of "dancing with himself" to pay-per-view porn, Idol wrecked three luxury hotel suites to pass the time while vacationing in Thailand in 1989. A friend of the peroxide rebel assured one hotel manager that the damage would be paid for once Billy had his fill of mayhem. A check was duly cut.

26
BOAT BLOAT

BILLY JOEL

Item: 57-FOOT COMMUTER YACHT

Cost: $2,000,000

Forget subways, forget taxis ... hell, forget helicopters: When Billy Joel commutes from his Long Island home into Manhattan, he does it on his custom-built 57-foot yacht, the *Vendetta*. It's one of four boats the piano man owns—after all, it's harder to get a DUI from the Coast Guard.

25
PUP PSYCHOLOGY

WILL SMITH

Item: DOG SHRINK

Cost: $2,500/MONTH

When the pressure of life on the A-list has Smith's four Rottweilers feeling down, he calls on the Sigmund Freud of the canine world—renowned Hollywood hound analyst Cesar Millan, a.k.a. "The Dog Whisperer." Apparently, it takes a special talent to help a pooch get over the trauma of watching *Bad Boys II*.

24
POND AMBITION

FREDDIE MERCURY

Item: FISH

Cost: $1,500,000

A passionate koi carp enthusiast, Mercury amassed a collection whose value rose to over $1,000,000. Tragically, after his death all but five of the 89 fish—worth up to $17,000 apiece—were killed in a bizarre gardening accident when landscapers at his London home turned off the power for their storage tank.

23
DOCTORED RESULTS

OZZY OSBOURNE

Item: DRUG "COUNSELING"

Cost: $708,000

After a successful narcotics detox in June 2002, Ozzy rehired Dr. David Kipper to provide him with antidepressants. The good doctor proceeded to charge Ozzy $650,000, plus $58,000 for the horseload of tranquilizers that resulted in the crazy trainwreck witnessed on *The Osbournes*.

22
FAMILY ALBUM

MARILYN MANSON

Item: CHARLES MANSON MEMORABILIA

Cost: $500

Given that Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey made Manson a reverend, it's fitting that Manson should visit Odium, the L.A. occult shop that was co-owned by LaVey's grandson. While there in 2002, Manson picked up framed photos of the Manson Family murder scene. Perfect for the guest dungeon!

21
BROADWAY BLUNDER

PAUL SIMON

Item: *THE CAPEMAN* MUSICAL

Cost: $3,000,000

In 1998, Paul Simon opened a play about a Puerto Rican teen who stabbed two white kids in 1959. Enraged picketers ("Murder is not entertainment!") outnumbered ticketholders. Backers backed out, Simon dug seven figures deep into his own pockets and *The Capeman* closed 10 weeks later—deeply in the hole.

20
BEATLE MANIA

GEORGE HARRISON

Item: THE NATURAL LAW PARTY

Cost: SEVERAL MILLION

Seduced by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Harrison dumped unspecified amounts into a British political party based on his philosophy (that all conflict can be solved through meditation) and organized a benefit concert at the Royal Albert Hall. They pulled a handsome 0.4% of the U.K. vote in 1992.

19
WHILE MY PENDANT GENTLY WEEPS

PATRICK KING JR.

Item: A DIAMOND-ENCRUSTED GUITAR NECKLACE

Cost: $30,000

Apparently more than confident that his Euro-tinged boy band Natural would succeed where countless others had failed, King blew the price of a new Acura on a tiny diamond guitar that—get this—actually plays!

David and Liza. Or their waxworks.

18
WONDERWALLET

NOEL GALLAGHER

Item: HOME REMODELING

Cost: $680,000

The Oasis guitarist was merely showing his love for the Beatles when he decided to cover his kitchen walls with costly paintings of yellow submarines in 1997. The $34,000 he spent on carpet in the colors of his favorite soccer team, on the other hand, is somewhat tougher to explain.

17
GEST OF HONOR

LIZA MINNELLI AND DAVID GEST

Item: WEDDING

Cost: $2.7 MILLION

It seemed like a match made in heaven: The gay icon and a guy who—ahem—is fond of musical theater. What could go wrong? The extravagant wedding was held in New York City in March 2002, but the marriage lasted barely a year and a half.

MINNELLI: ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION: JOHN JAY

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Luciana Morad celebrates getting another check from Mick Jagger.

16

MILLION-DOLLAR BABY

MICK JAGGER

Item: LOVE CHILD

Cost: $15,000,000

Born in 1999, Lucas Maurice Morad Jagger turned his father's affair with Brazilian lingerie model Luciana Morad into one of the most expensive flings in history. Jagger's new son was the final straw for long-suffering wife Jerry Hall, who got a reported $15,000,000 divorce settlement from him—while Morad hit him with a claim for $35,000 a month in child support, citing nannies, rent, housekeeping and security.

15

U CAN'T AFFORD THIS

MC HAMMER

Item: CALIFORNIA MANSION

Cost: $12,000,000

When Stanley Burrell became a global pop-rap superstar worth $30 million in 1990, he did what anyone would do—put 250 people, many of them friends, on his payroll, bought 17 luxury cars—and a Bay Area mansion. By 1996 he'd found God and filed for bankruptcy, $13.7 million in debt.

14

CROWD CONTROL

BRYAN ADAMS

Item: PEACE AND QUIET

Cost: $680,000

After releasing *Waking Up the Neighbors*, adoptive Londoner Adams then lived it; the pub next to his Chelsea mansion hosted boisterous louts whose noise kept him from sleeping. In 1994, Adams did the only feasible thing: He bought the bar ... and shut it down.

13

CLASS ACT

JOHN LENNON

Item: ALL OF FIRST CLASS

Cost: $12,980

Lennon famously banked on his "working class hero" image, but didn't shy away from enjoying the fruits of his Beatles labor, and once bought out an entire first-class airline cabin—so that his son Sean could set up his model train set. Fittingly, Lennon now has an airport named after him in Liverpool.

12

PRIVILEGED HEADGEAR

BONO

Item: FLYING A HAT FIRST CLASS

Cost: $1,700

Poised to play a charity show for Iraqis with Luciano Pavarotti in 2003, Bono realised he'd forgotten his favourite trilby, so he arranged to have it flown from London to Italy by British Airways. Amid fears it might get squashed, lost or stolen, the hat was upgraded from its first-class seat and got to ride up front with the captain.

11

A VIEW TO A SPILL

SIMON LE BON

Item: YACHT

Cost: $1.35 MILLION

The Duran Duran frontman planned to sail his 78-foot racing sloop around the world, but nearly died when it capsized in the English Channel in 1985, trapping him underneath for 20 minutes. He later sold the yacht to a Scottish car dealer; supermodels and champagne, presumably, were not included.

10

PAPAL BULL

KANYE WEST

Item: MICHELANGELO'S CEILING

Cost: $350,000

"I'm the closest that hip-hop is getting to God," remarked Kanye West recently. "In some situations I'm like a ghetto Pope." Which may explain the decoration he chose for his L.A. dining room last year: a complete recreation of Michelangelo's frescoes from Rome's Sistine Chapel ceiling.

9

PETA TO THE METAL

NELLY

Item: MINK-LINED ROLLS-ROYCE

Cost: $385,000

Despite a trip to the customizer for new rims, Nelly clearly felt his Rolls-Royce Phantom still lacked a certain discreet charm, so he had the interior totally reworked in mink fur. Just consider the aesthetics: It probably looks as if someone stuck a Wookiee in a microwave.

8

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

THE KLF

Item: TORCHED CASH

Cost: $1,700,000

Ah, who *doesn't* love the smell of flaming cash in the morning? British pop duo KLF clearly do—why else would they have set 20,000 50-pound notes ablaze, then circulated a videotape of the bonfire? Some say the 1994 stunt was inspired materialist satire. Others called it moronic decadence. Starving children worldwide were unavailable for comment.

7

BAR FOR THE COURSE

RON WOOD

Item: A REPLICA BRITISH PUB

Cost: $66,000

When the Rolling Stones guitarist bought Sandymount, an "18th century gentleman's residence" in County Kildare, Ireland, he outfitted the garden with a British pub where the Stones could relax during rehearsal sessions. Nowadays, though, it tends to go half-stocked thanks to Wood's sporadic bouts with sobriety.

MORAD: PWX/REX USA; LE BON: JOHNNY ROSZA/IDOLS

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6

FOOTBALL FOOLISHNESS

ROD STEWART

Item: PERSONAL SOCCER FIELD

Cost: $100,000

There's being a sports fan, and then there's building a professional-sized soccer field on the grounds of your Epping, England, mansion, complete with dressing rooms modeled on those of Scottish team Celtic FC, and groundsmen to maintain them. Sadly, in 2004, English zoning officials objected to his plans to install floodlighting.

5

SATURDAY NIGHT'S ALRIGHT FOR ... FLORISTS

ELTON JOHN

Item: FLOWERS

Cost: $419,000

Although renowned for his lavish spending habits and Rococo taste in interior décor, it still came as a surprise to learn that between 1996 and 1997 Elton John spent almost half a million dollars on flowers alone. Even he's not sure how he did it. Questioned over his expenditure during a 2000 trial, he replied simply, "I like flowers."

4

GOLD DUST MAN

MICK FLEETWOOD

Item: COCAINE

Cost: $8,000,000

In 1994, Mick Fleetwood estimated how long a single cocaine rail, composed of everything he'd ever blown, would stretch. He guessed five miles, but given his concurrent admission that he'd spent a lifetime total of $8 million on coke, five miles sounds like an average weekend. Fleetwood later described himself as "cocaine monster, rampaging the countryside out of my mind."

3

ELECTRIC DREAMS

THE BEATLES

Item: APPLE ELECTRONICS

Cost: $510,000

Part of the Beatles' infamously extravagant Apple Corps company, which also included Apple Records and a boutique, was this subdivision led by one "Magic" Alex. In his single year of employment, Alex outlined numerous inventions, including electric paint, a flying saucer and a recording studio with a "sonic force field," not one of which ever worked. He was fired in 1969.

2

AN OFFER HE COULDN'T REFUSE

MICHAEL JACKSON

Item: MARLON BRANDO

Cost: $1,000,000

A frequent (and conspicuously overage) guest at Neverland, Brando demanded a cool mil for his bizarre appearance at Jackson's 30th Anniversary show in September 2001. After accurately introducing himself to the Garden crowd as an "old fat fart," the star of Jackson's "You Rock My World" video ranted about children being hacked to death with machetes ... from a leather recliner.

Elvis: bedroom eyes, batshit-crazy waistcoat.

1

SNACK ATTACK

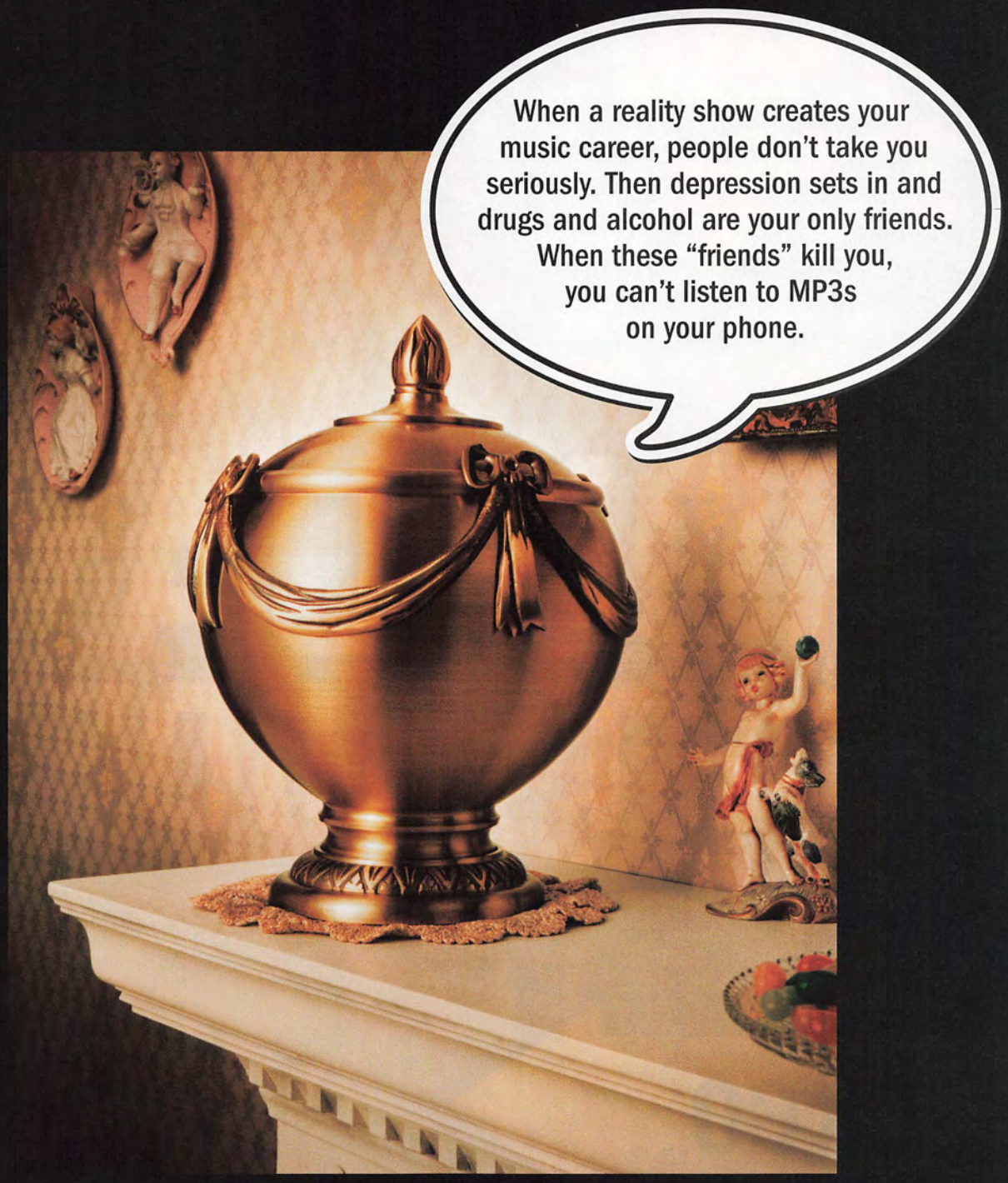
ELVIS PRESLEY

Item: PEANUT BUTTER AND BACON SANDWICHES

Cost: $3,387.28

On the night of Feburary 1, 1976, Elvis Presley pulled off a stunt that combined three of his favorite activities—profligate spending, showing off to cops and eating repellent things. While entertaining two Colorado policemen at Graceland, he mentioned a sandwich that he had once eaten at the Colorado Gold Mine Company restaurant in Denver: a hollowed, buttered loaf, filled with peanut butter, jelly and a pound of fried bacon. The sandwich was meant to feed eight, but Presley had finished one unaided. Remarkably, one of the cops expressed an interest. Even more remarkably, Presley insisted they should head to Denver to try it, a distance of 1,000 miles. His stretch Mercedes took them to the Memphis airport, where his private jet, the Lisa Marie—upholstered in aquamarine plush in further testament to the King's understated elegance—awaited. Two hours later, they landed in Denver, where 22 of the $49.95 "Fool's Gold" sandwiches on silver platters, plus a bucket of Perrier water and a case of champagne, were brought to a private hangar at the airport by the restaurateur, his wife and a waiter.

STEWART: TB/REX USA; PRESLEY: MICHAELOCHSARCHIVES.COM; SANDWICH: ALPHONSE TELYMONDE;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WHAT ARE TIM AND DAMIAN GOING TO GET FROM THE REST OF THE BAND?

"Tim will get something from an infomercial. Every year we try to get him something classy or thoughtful but, as it turns out, he always gets most excited about something that he buys for himself while he's channel surfing at 4:30 a.m. For a whole week he tried wearing one of those **electro-shock belts** that supposedly exercises your stomach. Damian is hoping for a **three-necked guitar** or a private concert by Cheap Trick."

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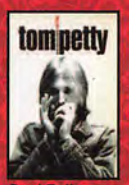

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12

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16

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17

17 KIA SPECTRA

Sure, it'll give Santa Claus a massive hernia to drop the Kia Spectra down your chimney. But with its six-speaker AM/FM/CD sound system and industry-leading safety features, this great, affordable sedan is worth it. Plus, Santa's probably got medical anyway. *kia.com*

18

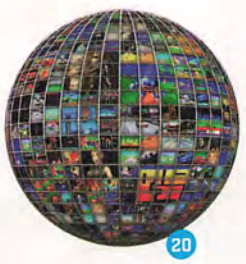
18 BOD MAN GIFT SET

New BOD Man Fragrance includes Body Sprays, Deodorant Sprays and Body Washes: crisp, clean, refreshing and long lasting. Hey, ladeeeez! *iwantyourbod.com*

19

19 DKNY JEANS, BLAZER AND JACQUARD SHIRT

Totally spiffy! They're the only words to describe this awesome black cotton velvet blazer and French cuffed shirt combo. Well, that and "sold at Macy's or Lord & Taylor." *macys.com*



20

20 GAMETAP

Log on to gametap.com and, for a mere $14.95 a month, you can play hundreds of the greatest games right from your broadband-connected PC. It's just one more reason to be grateful for what scientists are calling "the Internet." *gametap.com*

21

21 LOGITECH WIRELESS HEADPHONES

Like a bus, these Logitech Wireless Headphones for iPod are "designed to move you." But can you wear a bus comfortably on your head for up to eight hours of uninterrupted play? No—and only a fool would try. *logitech.com*

22

22 PUMA TRUE CRIME RS-100

Puma's True Crime RS-100 was inspired by urban cop drama videogame *True Crime: New York City*. How inspired? It's got a freakin' map of New York City on it, that's how inspired! *puma.com*

WHAT ARE DAN AND ANDY GOING TO GET FROM THE REST OF THE BAND?

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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

O. OK GO: OK NO

The new album from our Gift Guide hosts and all-around good guys is in stores now and, apparently, "shivering like an abandoned little kitten, waiting to be purchased by a loving person such as you." So go and buy it! *okgo.net*

A. JAMES BLUNT: BACK TO BEDLAM
Heartfelt debut from British singer-songwriter.

B. NIRVANA: SLIVER
Best of their box set, plus three unreleased tracks.

C. THE MAGIC NUMBERS: THE MAGIC NUMBERS
First album from much-tipped Brit rockers.

D. BEASTIE BOYS: SOLID GOLD HITS
"Sure Shot," "Sabotage," "Intergalactic" and more.

E. THE DARKNESS: ONE WAY TICKET TO HELL ... AND BACK
Excellent return from the spandex rockers.

F. SHEEK LOUCH: AFTER TAXES
New CD featuring guest stars T.I. and Fabolous.

G. SIGUR ROS: TAKK
Fourth and finest album from ambient Icelanders.

H. SUBLIME: GOLD
Comprehensive double-disc best-of.

I. THE LIKE: ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING?
Debut release from recent *Blender* Next Big Things.

J. JOHNNY CASH: THE LEGEND OF ...
Best of the Man In Black.

K. KORN: SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE
"Evolutionary" newie. Features "Twisted Transistor."

L. TANQUERAY TRACKS VOLUME 1
Includes "Get Your Ice On."

M. BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS: AFRICA UNITE
Features the reggae legend's first "new" track in more than a decade.

N. GOAPELE: CHANGE IT ALL
Sophomore set from Oakland R&B songstress.

O. OK GO: OK NO
See sidebar for details.

P. AEON FLUX
Game spinoff from the MTV-series-turned-Charlize-Theron-sci-fi-extravaganza.

Q. DESTROY ALL HUMANS
Hypnotize, terrorize and vaporize the human race. Oh yes!

R. TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND
Superlative rock-and-punk-fueled skater game.

S. GUN
Greed and lust run rampant—at *Blender*! But also in this Western game.

T. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: BORN TO RUN DVD
Thirtieth anniversary commemorative concert DVD, documentary and remastered CD.

U. BOB DYLAN: NO DIRECTION HOME
Scorsese meets Bob.

V. TUPAC: LIVE AT THE HOUSE OF BLUES
Features Snoop Dogg, Tha Dogg Pound and Outlawz.

W. U2: 2005 VERTIGO LIVE FROM CHICAGO
The biggest band in the world: in concert!

X. BATMAN BEGINS
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DAVE GAHAN

HE'S DONE MORE DRUGS—AND EVEN DIED MORE—THAN ALL FOUR MÖTLEY CRÜE MEMBERS COMBINED. YET THE INDESTRUCTIBLE DEPECHE MODE FRONTMAN HAS SURVIVED OVERDOSES, TALKING TIN MEN AND ILL-ADVISED TAINT-PIERCINGS TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS ... TO THE BEST OF HIS RECOLLECTION

BY VICTORIA DE SILVERIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN HILL

"MY FACE HURTS," says Dave Gahan, sitting on a penthouse veranda at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills in a slim black suit and wifebeater. "We all went to see *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* last night and I laughed so hard my jaw is still sore. During the saddest moments of my life, I had lost my sense of humor."

There was a time when Gahan had more to worry about than his funnybone. The Depeche Mode frontman, whose cavernous voice ushered in an era of new-romantic gloom, was almost felled by his grunge-era heroin habit, an addiction that led to numerous overdoses, a suicide attempt, a weird Bugs Bunny doll roommate (more on that later) and death, for two minutes.

Despite deciding to "play the whole rock-star thing to the full and burn out," the eight-years-sober Gahan, 43, is sinewy, tanned and wrinkle-free. Even in the unforgiving glare of the afternoon sun, his only visible scars are from an aborted tattoo on his forearm and a gnarly wound on his elbow, the result of an extreme Pilates position he's been practicing.

Though he's sold more than 50 million records with a band he started 25 years ago with Martin Gore, Andrew Fletcher and Vince Clarke, written a well-received solo effort, *Paper Monsters*, in 2003 and is promoting Depeche Mode's eleventh album, the return-to-form *Playing the Angel*, Gahan is feeling modest.

"Turning down that radio up there is the key," he says, pointing to what lies beneath his perfect black coif. "Even now, it will tell me to end it. The difference now is that I'm like, Shut the fuck up!" A yoga state of mind we hope he keeps, as we expose him to your inquiring minds ... →

STYLING: PAUL & ISABELLE FOR LUXE MANAGEMENT. GROOMING: ASIA GRIGER FOR CELESTINE AGENCY. PROP STYLING: NICK TORTORICCI

VINTAGE LEVI'S JACKET AND VINTAGE KRAFTWERK SHIRT FROM **LO-FI, L.A.** JEANS BY **VIVIENNE WESTWOOD** SHOES BY **D SQUARED**

Dave Gahan won't come down until we promise him ice cream.

Grunge fan Gahan rocks the flannel after his 1996 speedball OD.

Martin Gore once again falls for the ol' "it's a bondage-themed shoot" gag.

DESCRIBE THE WORST DAY OF YOUR CHILDHOOD.
GEESUS, IRVINE, CA

I can think of two. When I was 11, I came home from school and was confronted with a man sitting next to my mom, who explained that this man was my father. Up until then, I'd thought that my stepfather, who'd died when I was 9, was my biological father. Turns out my father had left us when I was very young. God bless my mom, she was doing the best she could, but I was brought up in that very English way that if there's something that might hurt your kid, you don't tell them. After that, I was like, fuck off to everything and I got into a lot of trouble, for stealing cars and robbing and thieving, which led to my other worst day. When I was about 15 I was sent away to a detention center for six weeks. It was a kid's prison—you march down the hall, get your blanket and new clothes, get screamed at and beat up. Joining Depeche Mode saved my life.

AT THE HEIGHT OF YOUR INFATUATION WITH GRUNGE, DID YOU ROCK A FLANNEL SHIRT?
HICCUP2000, SANTA MONICA, CA

I don't think I "rocked" a flannel shirt, but I definitely had my fair share of flannel shirts. There are some pictures of me being arrested in one. I wore them more so that I wouldn't get noticed, so I could blend in.

DO YOU STILL WEAR A SCROTUM RING?
SHOVAK, JENKINTOWN, PA

It wasn't a scrotum ring, it was a geish—that's a piercing in the part between your scrotum and your ass. It's supposedly the most erotic place to be pierced, but I would beg to differ with that. I don't know if any piercing is that erotic, really. For me, it was probably about the pain. I knew it was time to get rid of it when one of my kids noticed it and was like, "Why do you have an earring in your ass?"

DID YOUR LIFE FLASH IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES WHEN YOU HAD YOUR NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE IN 1996?
FASHIONCHIK2, CARSON CITY, NV

Oh yeah. I saw Jennifer, who is my wife now, and she was calling me back. I had this feeling that she was a light, a good thing in my life. I also heard a voice really loud that was saying 'This is wrong! You don't get to decide!' I could see myself surrounded by the paramedics and I was screaming down: 'I'm here, I'm here!' I felt like, oh my God, I made a big mistake! This is not what I wanted! And all of a sudden I felt that surge coming back to life. I found out later that Jennifer, who was in New York, felt at the time, 4 A.M., an overwhelming feeling that something terrible had happened to me.

"I STILL WAKE UP IN THE MORNING FULL OF GLOOM AND DOOM."

HOW LONG AFTER YOU FLATLINED DID YOU GIVE UP DRUGS?
EYEPOD2005, CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH

It still took me about two years after that to ask for help. At that point I was finally court-mandated to stay sober. It was either that or go to jail. So I went to live at a sober living house and they would pull us in randomly to be urine-tested. It was really humbling, but at the same time I felt the best I had ever felt in my life.

WHAT SONG DID YOU SING IN YOUR AUDITION FOR THE BAND?
KSWAGGER, NEW YORK

"Heroes" by David Bowie—it was an accident though. One night I was messing around at rehearsals with this other band and someone started playing that song and I started to sing. Martin and Andy and Vince were next door and they heard me. A couple of weeks later, Vince called me and asked if I wanted to rehearse with them.

I'M THINKING OF BUYING A PAIR OF LEATHER TROUSERS. ANY ADVICE?
UNICORNLVR, ANTIOCH, CA

Yes. First, find someone to make them for you, because you'll never find a pair that fits you properly otherwise. Make sure they are black, too.

IS IT TRUE THAT YOU HAD A WEIRD RABBIT DOLL WHEN YOU WERE A JUNKIE?
BLCKCELEBRATION, LIVINGSTON, NJ

Oh yes. The last couple of years in California, I was living in a little apartment in Santa Monica and I had—well, it's really sad, actually—this huge Bugs Bunny doll. Which would become quite animated when I was out of my mind. I also had a Tin Man and a Lion. The Tin Man used to speak to me. It was basically psychotic behavior, which of course now I can see. But at the time I thought, "Doesn't everyone have these things?"

HOW OUT OF IT WERE YOU WHEN YOU BROUGHT A SPIRITUAL ADVISOR ON TOUR WITH THE BAND?
STRNGLVE, SAN FRANCISCO

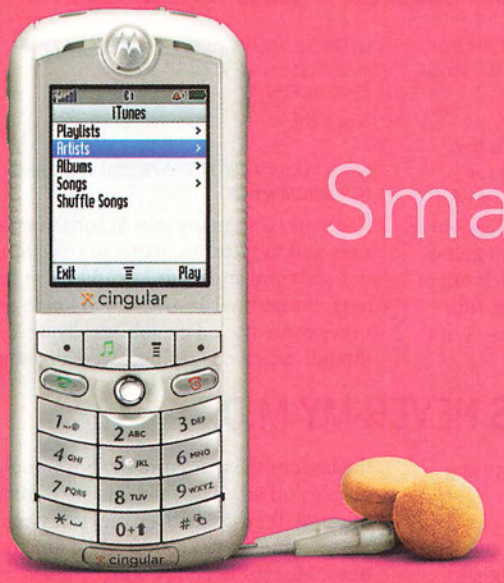
Jonathan Kessler actually handled accounting stuff for us, but we referred to him as our spiritual advisor as a joke. What he did was act as a mediator between us since we were all in very different places. We did take a psychiatrist on the road, to help us communicate, but we never ever sat down together. The idea though was sort of like the Metallica film, *Some Kind of Monster*, but before that came out, of course. I never went to see the psychiatrist and I'm pretty sure no one else in the band did either. Some crew members did though, and after a period of time, the doctor left, saying 'You are all insane and need to be committed.'

ASIDE FROM DYING, WHAT IS THE DUMBEST THING YOU'VE EVER DONE ON DRUGS?
KARMAKID, TALLAHASSEE, FL

Ha! Take them in the first place. Moderation was never my M.O.

GAHAN: KERRY DAVIES/SPLASH NEWS; DEPECHE MODE: PAUL NATKIN ARCHIVE/WIREIMAGE.COM

cingular
raising the bar



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Dave readies up another spoonful.

Depeche Mode in 1980: Dave Gahan, Vince Clarke, Martin Gore and Andrew Fletcher.

DO YOU HAVE ANY NICKNAMES?
PEGGYSUE99, FORT COLLINS, CO

A paramedic who, well, I wouldn't say I became friendly with him, but he treated me a few times for overdoses, was like, this guy is a cat. He's got nine lives. So some people have called me "Cat."

OUT OF YOUR 11 RECORDS, WHICH ONE IS YOUR LEAST FAVORITE?
PRINCEODARKNESS, FORT LEE, NJ

Ultra was my least favorite to make. That was a bit of a mess. But my least favorite record in terms of sound was *Broken Frame*, our second one. That was when Martin was thrown into the deep end to write all the songs [after Vince Clarke left the band]. We struggled for a few albums to try to find something, our sound.

WHO DOES THE BEST COVER OF "PERSONAL JESUS"?
DUFFBEER, MEMPHIS, TN

Johnny Cash, by far. He pared it down to its barest form. Martin originally got the idea from reading Priscilla Presley's biography on Elvis. She said that Elvis was her personal Jesus.

IT'S 1994, YOU'RE MIDWAY THROUGH THE SONGS OF FAITH AND DEVOTION TOUR AND IT'S 10 MINUTES BEFORE YOU GO ONSTAGE—PAINT A PICTURE OF THE SCENE BACKSTAGE.
JLANNERT, OSSINING, NY

Well, I was usually locked away in my dressing room—we had separate dressing rooms at the time, separate everything, actually. The weird thing was, during that period, even though I was messed up, I'd do an hour of yoga before the show. When people are really in the grips of addiction, you often think you are on a higher plane, and doing yoga was all part of that. I was really disciplined about it. I think it amazed people, because I would come off stage and get straight into the drugs and the booze and that would go on all night.

HOW IS IT THAT YOU LOOK SO GOOD AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?
TPEBBLE, BAYONNE, NJ

Well, I don't go there anymore with the booze and the drugs, and I haven't for about eight years. That might be part of it. I still wake up in the morning full of gloom and doom. I do not jump out of bed going "Wooo hooo! Let's go!" To get myself out of that funk, I get moving. I run three, four times a week—only for 30 minutes—but I run pretty fast.

"MODERATION WAS NEVER MY M.O."

ARE YOU STILL THE WORLD'S FOREMOST NEW-ROMANTIC GOTH FISHERMAN?
FUNKYDANCER, GERMANTOWN, PA

Yes! I just went actually with my brother Pete. It was cool, just sitting next to each other. After all the stuff that's happened, I still have my fishing poles. I think the biggest fish that I caught was probably a 10-pound carp. That might be exaggerating a bit.

WHY DID YOU START WAXING YOUR CHEST?
JHENKLES, ANAHEIM, CA

I've got one of those chests like the guy from *40-Year-Old Virgin*—hairy and kind of patchy—and I'm very vain. I don't really like body hair, to be honest. I like to be streamlined, like a dolphin. I don't really do it anymore though.

HAVE YOU TALKED TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT DRUGS YET?
JESUSISMYPAL, MODESTO, CA

Oh yeah, we talk about it. If there is one good thing that has come out of all of this, it's that we are open to talk about those things. Drugs aren't things that our kids are going to be able to hide from us. We know all about it. It's not going to be like, "Oh, hmm, I wonder if he's smoking pot." But if they choose to go down that path, I'm way more equipped to be supportive and to give advice.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT GETTING MARRIED IN LAS VEGAS?
REALELVIS, RENO, NV

Not a lot.

WHAT WAS THE WORST JOB YOU EVER HAD?
CRUMBS88, NEW YORK

I've worked so many jobs at construction sites and in factories, paperboy, washing up in hotels and stuff, but I would never last long. Sometimes I would go to lunch and never come back. One job I really liked, though, was landscaping. We'd all get in the back of the truck and the boss would drop us off at a bare field and we'd rotovate the land, then come back the next week, throw some seeds around and plant small trees. Months later, it would be grass with trees and we'd dance on it and then mow.

IN ALL, HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU THINK YOU STUCK IN YOUR ARM?
KHARRIS, VIRGINIA BEACH, VA

One of the first things you have to do when you go to a rehab is try to work that out, to take an inventory, so that you see the value of what you've wasted. The answer, especially if you include all the rehabs, is a ridiculous amount of money, a shameful amount. For a few years, I was spending $2,000 to $3,000 a week. I'm sure it's a lot more than that, if you figure in all the damage it caused. It's insane.

WHAT SONG IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS DO YOU WISH YOU HAD WRITTEN?
BIGDIPPER9, AMHERST, NY

"Hiding All Away," from the new Nick Cave album, *Abattoir Blues*. The line "I was hidden, dear, hiding all away" particularly rings in my ears. I think he's an absolute genius, a poet.

WHAT ARE YOUR VICES NOW?
PAPERPUSHER00, WILMINGTON, DE

Dark chocolate. I prefer it to be from Belgium. I don't think there is a day that goes by that I don't eat some. It's my reward. [BLENDER]

LEFT TO RIGHT: ETHAN HILL; JOE BANGAY/LFI

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"LIVIN' ON A PRAYER"

HOW MULLETED DREAMBOATS BON JOVI WROTE THE BIGGEST SINGALONG OF THE '80S—AND FINALLY MOVED OUT OF THEIR PARENTS' HOUSES

BY JOSH EELLS

The Greatest Songs Ever

BLENDER EXPLORES THE FINEST TUNES IN HISTORY

19 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH — DECEMBER 1986

RICHIE SAMBORA remembers exactly how rough things were for his band before "Livin' on a Prayer." "We were all living at home, all broke," he tells *Blender*. But that wasn't the worst part. "My guitar roadie," Sambora grimaces, "was making twice as much as me."

In January of 1986, Bon Jovi were a long way from stadium tours and *Oprah* specials. Formed three years earlier, the New Jersey hair-metal quintet already had a pair of gold albums under their glittery belts. But they were stuck opening for arena-rock also-rans like Ratt and the Scorpions in places like the Des Moines Civic Center. They'd seen a million faces, and rocked ... maybe half of them. Tired from touring and still in debt to their label, Sambora and singer Jon Bon Jovi sat down to write their third album, knowing they faced a make-or-break situation. "If it failed, the band wouldn't have continued," Sambora says.

"We knew we had to deliver something that was going to be big at pop radio," Bon Jovi says. The solution: Desmond Child, a hired-gun songsmith who had already penned hits for Kiss and power-ballad queen Bonnie Tyler. The three of them met at Sambora's parents' house, where he still lived, cranking out ideas in a dark, damp basement with just a single space heater to keep them warm. But it was at a borrowed apartment in New York City that they struck on what would become their biggest hit.

"I was sick as a dog," Sambora recalls. "Driving to the city, I was literally opening my car door and throwing up." When the guitarist arrived, Child and Bon Jovi were kicking around an idea: the Springsteenian story of a down-and-out couple fighting to make ends meet.

They took turns shouting out lines, and soon they had their heroes: Tommy, an unemployed dockworker, and Gina, a waitress working double shifts. The principals differ on their inspiration—Child claims it was himself and his girlfriend, Bon Jovi says two of his pals—but in the end it didn't matter: It was a blue-collar fairy tale (the opening line is "Once upon a time") starring two Everykids fans couldn't help rooting for.

Finally, Child snuck in a secret weapon: a sudden, soaring key change in the final chorus, the kind that gives songs like "Mandy" and "I Will Always Love You" their dramatic, lump-in-your-throat payoffs. "I thought right then that it was the best song we had ever written," Sambora says.

Jon wasn't so sure. "He said it was too wimpy—too feminine," Child recalls. "Richie and I were scratching our heads, saying 'This sounds like a smash!'" On the ride back to Jersey, the singer suggested that they could put it on a soundtrack.

But Sambora eventually won; when the band flew to Vancouver later that spring to record the new album with producer Bruce Fairbairn, "Prayer" was on the schedule. They set up shop in Little Mountain, a tiny studio, and marveled at the city's snow-capped mountain peaks and real-life Eskimos. "It was a beautiful, undiscovered little town," Bon Jovi says. "Very innocent."

Sambora laughs. "Until we showed up."

"They were like a gang," recalls Bob Rock, a then-unknown recording engineer now famous for producing Metallica and Mötley Crüe. "They dressed very flashy, they did speed, they were completely insane in terms of the women. Their whole eight weeks there was just strippers and debauchery."

A club called No. 5 Orange quickly became the band's favorite. "We walked in and next thing we know we're looking at complete nakedness," Sambora says. The girls would actually descend from a pole into this shower and soap themselves up, right in the middle of the stage.

"Needless to say, we proceeded to enjoy that town immensely."

They also managed to spend a few days working. According to Rock, the basic track for "Livin' on a Prayer" took only two hours to record. By the next afternoon the song was finished, complete with all the flourishes that would help make it a smash—including Sambora's talkbox, a gadget that hadn't been popular since Peter Frampton's '70s heyday. "Everyone thought it sounded like a duck," the guitarist says. "But it worked."

For Bon Jovi, the toughest part turned out to be the most important: hitting that climactic key change. "He only got it once," says Rock. "I think somebody must have squeezed his balls or something."

Once the rest of the songs were done—and after the band had been evicted from their condo for an incident involving a steak knife and a neighbor's plastic flamingos—Bon Jovi returned to the states, opening for southern rockers .38 Special. But they wouldn't be a warm-up act for long.

Slippery When Wet—its title an homage to the showering girls of No. 5 Orange—was released in August and went platinum by October, thanks to "You Give Love a Bad Name," the band's first No. 1. But, as Bob Rock says: "'Bad Name' was big—but 'Prayer' was mega." A perfect Reagan-era blend of desperation and hope, the song hit No. 1 on Valentine's Day 1987 and stayed on top for four weeks. For a while, *Slippery* was selling over a million copies a month. "Every day we broke another record," Bon Jovi says. "It was our *Thriller*—our *Born in the U.S.A.*"

"Prayer" also helped pave the way for a generation of acid-washed, blow-dried MTV bad boys. "That song opened the floodgates for so many bands," says Child. "Poison, Mötley, Skid Row—even Aerosmith rode in on it for their second wave."

And though the stripclub-loving Jersey boys might blush to admit it, the song also signaled the rise of warmer, fuzzier hard rock. "Instead of metal just being about bimbos and red Corvettes," Child says, "all of a sudden there were story songs. And that's when the girls started coming around."

Today "Prayer" continues to loom large in that real Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the karaoke bar ... even if the high note isn't any easier 20 years on.

"Goddammit," Bon Jovi laughs. "I've been grabbing my nuts ever since." [BLENDER]

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG: "Livin' on a Prayer"
ARTIST: Bon Jovi
PERFORMERS:
Jon Bon Jovi, *vocals*
Richie Sambora, *guitar, vocals, talkbox*
Alec John Such, *bass*
Dave Bryan, *keyboards*
Tico Torres, *drums*
LABEL: Mercury
PRODUCER: Bruce Fairbairn
CHART DEBUT: December 1986
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: 1

WHO'S WHO

RICHIE SAMBORA
Bon Jovi lead guitarist and, since 1994, Mr. Heather Locklear.

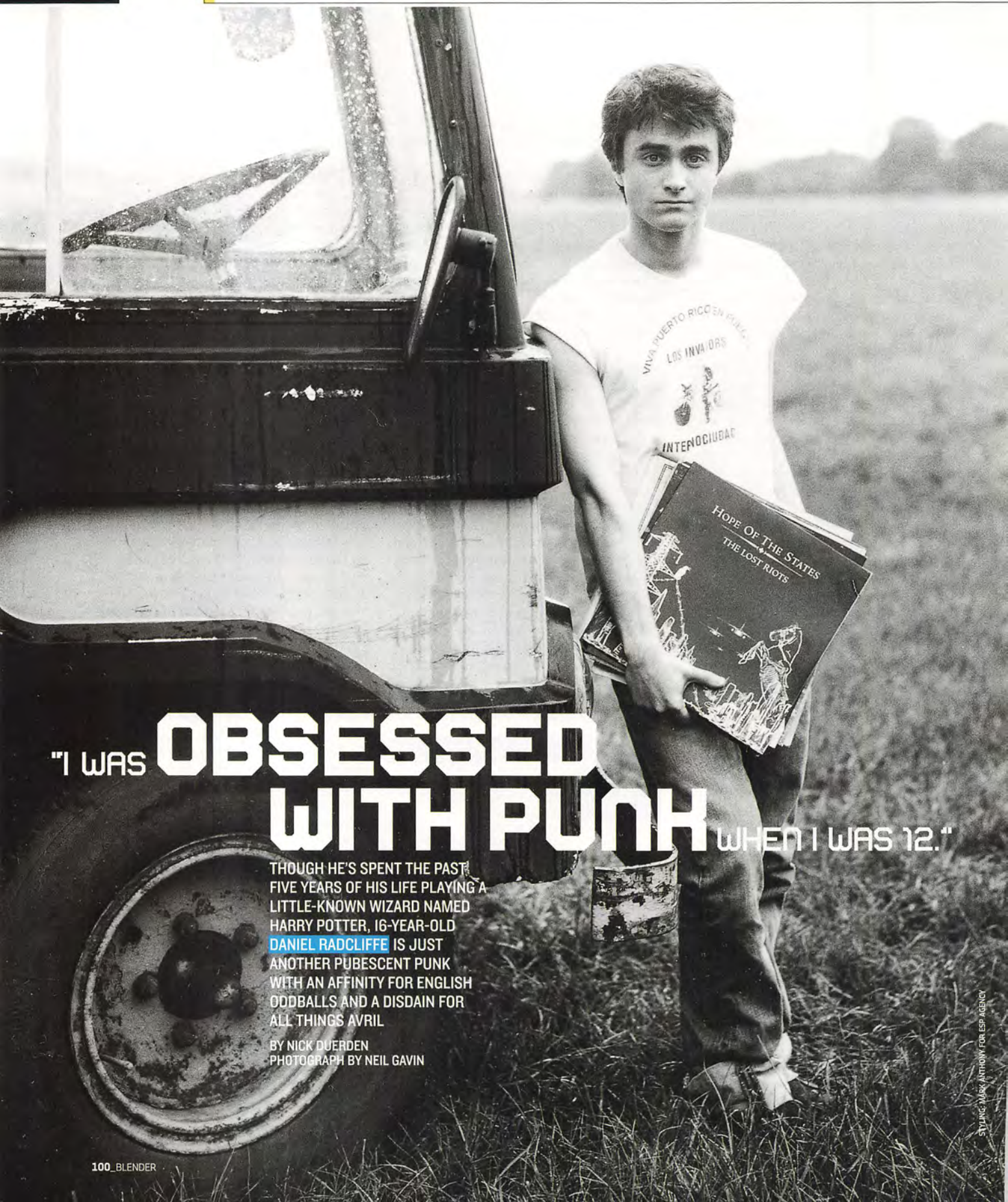
DESMOND CHILD
Songwriting wiz whose credits include Aerosmith's "Angel" and Ricky Martin's "Livin' la Vida Loca."

JON BON JOVI
Bon Jovi frontman-slash-namesake and onetime *Ally McBeal* co-star.

BON JOVI: TIMOTHY WHITE/CORBIS OUTLINE; SAMBORA: NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS

My Music

OUR FAVORITE STARS' FAVORITE RECORDS



"I WAS OBSESSED WITH PUNK WHEN I WAS 12."

THOUGH HE'S SPENT THE PAST FIVE YEARS OF HIS LIFE PLAYING A LITTLE-KNOWN WIZARD NAMED HARRY POTTER, 16-YEAR-OLD DANIEL RADCLIFFE IS JUST ANOTHER PUBESCENT PUNK WITH AN AFFINITY FOR ENGLISH ODDBALLS AND A DISDAIN FOR ALL THINGS AVRIL

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL GAVIN

STYLING: MARK ANTHONY FOR ESP AGENCY

THE ALBUM THAT
ALCOHOLIC ROBOTS LOVE

GRANDADDY
THE SOPHTWARE SLUMP
V2, 2000

"This is like a warm and gentle *OK Computer*. I love the song 'Jed the Humanoid,' about a robot that drinks itself to death, and it's all very sad. Now, this is a preposterous subject for a song, but to make it actually move you takes some skill, right? This is the perfect album to listen to when I'm on a plane. I just put my headphones on, block out everything and drift off to another place completely."

THE ALBUM THAT
PUTS MALL-PUNK TO SHAME

THE LIBERTINES
UP THE BRACKET
ROUGH TRADE, 2002

"For me, this album is a reaction to bands like blink-182 and Sum 41. The Libertines don't even claim to be punk, they just are: They have the attitude, the intelligence, and this album is so raw it hurts. Does Pete Doherty make me want to smoke crack? No! He is an icon who just happens to take lots of drugs; he is not an icon *because* he takes lots of drugs. He is incredibly talented, and a little messed up. I hope he doesn't OD."

THE ALBUM THAT'S
PERFECT FOR WELSH VACATIONS

WEEZER
THE BLUE ALBUM
DGC, 1994

"I've heard that Rivers Cuomo is a very strange man. Is that true? Well, I still think he and his band make terrific music. This, for my money, is their best album, even better than *Pinkerton*, but that's maybe because it reminds me of a holiday I had in Wales with some really good friends. We would just laze around the house playing "Undone—The Sweater Song" over and over again, until we got sick of it."

THE ALBUM THAT'S
AS GOOD AS KURT SAID

PIXIES
DOOLITTLE
ELEKTRA, 1989

"Kurt Cobain used to say that his band stole everything from the Pixies, and he wasn't lying. *Doolittle* is fantastic, it's strange and brilliant. Did you know that 'Debaser' is based on that horrific Salvador Dalí film where he cuts open a person's eye? My favorite Pixies song is 'Where Is My Mind?' from *Surfer Rosa*—it reminds me of this girl I had a huge crush on and couldn't get out of my head. Nothing happened between us, which makes the song even more poignant."

THE ALBUM THAT
MADE ME WHO I AM

THE SEX PISTOLS
NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS
WARNER BROS., 1977

"I love real punk—not Avril Lavigne, who thinks wearing a tie is punk. This is my favorite album of all time, and I got into it during the filming of *Harry Potter* 2, when I was 12. I was obsessed with punk back then. If the Beatles were a phenomenon, then the Sex Pistols were a revolution. Punk is about rebellion, about not caring what other people think of you, and being free. And it's not about fighting. I don't fight. I don't spit, either."

THE ALBUM THAT
TOTALLY CREEPS ME OUT

MANIC STREET PREACHERS
THE HOLY BIBLE
SONY, 1994

"*The Holy Bible* is like no album I have ever heard. It's so dark, it really sounds as if they have gone into themselves and are telling you some very difficult truths. It doesn't hold back anything. Have you heard '4st, 7lb'? It's a devastating song, really upsetting, especially when you consider that their guitarist went missing 11 years ago and his body was never found. I like to think he is alive somewhere, but it's not very likely."

THE ALBUM THAT
BONDS ME WITH DAD

T-REX
ELECTRIC WARRIOR
REPRISE, 1971

"I got into this through my dad, who is a huge T-Rex fan. Most people my age, I guess, would have simply gone for the *Greatest Hits*, but I wanted to discover the real T-Rex, and for me, this is the album that defines Marc Bolan as a legend. Music should have the power to take you to very dark places and prompt some very strange emotions, but music should also be able to make you smile sometimes. And this album makes me smile so much."

THE ALBUM THAT'S
BETTER THAN SHATNER

PULP
DIFFERENT CLASS
ISLAND, 1995

"Will Steggle, who works in the wardrobe department of the *Harry Potter* films, is my best friend. Will's 39 and he maintains that he used to share a flat with Pulp singer Jarvis Cocker, and that Jarvis used to steal all of his coffee. I've just met him—he has a small part in *Goblet of Fire*. Most Americans only know the song 'Common People' because William Shatner covered it. That's just terrible! They should check out the original—it's much, much better."

THE ALBUM THAT
GIVES ME CHILLS

HOPE OF THE STATES
THE LOST RIOTS
SONY, 2004

"Like Godspeed You! Black Emperor, this band's music is like modern classical. I hesitate to use the word 'epic' because everybody uses it, but this really is a massive record. Whenever I'm really into an album, I want to learn about the band's history, and this one is pretty tragic because guitarist James Lawrence committed suicide just before the album was released. I suppose that makes the band more interesting, but it's really just sad."

THE ALBUM THAT
GETS ME INTO CHARACTER

THE ARCADE FIRE
FUNERAL
MERGE, 2004

"I just saw them at the Reading Festival and they were amazing. The drummer was drumming the backs of everybody's head, and the keyboardist was wearing a motorcycle helmet! Their lyrical imagery is incredible: 'Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels)' even alludes to evolution, if I'm not mistaken: 'Forget all we used to know/And then our skin gets thicker/From living out in the snow.' Fantastic! I love to listen to this album just before I'm about to film a scene."

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Brian Jones in 1967: young, dumb and soon to be full of chlorinated water.

THE DEATH OF BRIAN

HE WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE ROLLING STONES, THE FIRST CRASH-AND-BURN ROCK JUNKIE—AND THE SUBJECT OF THE ORIGINAL SUPERSTAR CONSPIRACY THEORY. THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER HE DROWNED IN HIS OWN POOL, WHY ARE INVESTIGATORS STILL WONDERING WHO KILLED BRIAN JONES?

BY DORIAN LYNSKEY

COTCHFORD FARM IS the kind of English country house you find in tourist brochures. It's an idyllic, red-tiled, sixteenth-century building surrounded by woods and rolling green fields in the county of Sussex, about an hour's drive south of London. It was once famous as the inspiration for *Winnie the Pooh*. The author, A.A. Milne, lived here for 30 years; a statue of his son, the real-life Christopher Robin, still stands in the grounds.

But on the night of July 2, 1969, Cotchford abruptly acquired a more sinister reputation. Shortly before midnight, the lifeless body of its then owner—Brian Jones, the recently sacked rhythm guitarist of the Rolling Stones—was pulled from the bottom of the outdoor swimming pool. He was 27. Five days later, coroners in nearby East Grinstead ruled that Jones had accidentally drowned while under the influence of alcohol and amphetamines.

●●●●●

BRIAN JONES WAS rock's first major drug casualty: an iconic golden boy whose vices ruined both his looks and his talent, but who died young enough to leave behind a glittering myth. His death inaugurated an age in which the world expected rock stars to succumb to self-destruction—in the two years that followed, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin all went a similar way. And his demise also became the subject of rock's first great conspiracy theory: Before the rumors that Elvis lives, that Kurt was murdered by Courtney, that Tupac was killed on the orders of Suge Knight ... this was the mysterious death that began it all.

The coroner's verdict on Jones' death was contentious from the start. There were significant inconsistencies in the original witness statements taken from the three people the police found at Cotchford: Anna Wohlin, Jones's 22-year-old girlfriend; Frank Thorogood, his live-in contractor; and Janet Lawson, a nurse who had been staying with Thorogood in the guest apartment. It was also well-known that Jones was a strong swimmer. His blood alcohol level was equivalent to just three and a half pints of beer.

The apparent anomalies were enough to give rise, almost immediately, to a series of wild speculations, one of which even argued that Jones had been murdered under the orders of his old bandmates. In the 36 years since then, a growing band of writers, fans and former associates have loudly maintained that the real story of the demise of the founding Rolling Stone has never been revealed. →

MONITOR PICTURE LIBRARY/RETNA

Clockwise from top left: Brian Jones's son Mark Andrews at the pool in which his father died; Jones with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, 1967; Jones's grave in Cheltenham, England.

First to publicly conjecture was the band's drug dealer, Tony Sanchez, who hinted in his 1979 book, *Up and Down With the Rolling Stones*, that Jones had been murdered but didn't name the culprit. In 1985, Jones's friend Nicholas Fitzgerald claimed that he had been at Cotchford that night and seen a group of shadowy figures submerging Jones in the pool. In the 1990s, two American writers, A.E. Hotchner and Geoffrey Giuliano, pointed the finger at Thorogood and his team of contractors. In 1994, journalist Terry Rawlings weighed in with his book, *Who Killed Christopher Robin?*

The clinching piece of evidence in Rawlings's book was the alleged deathbed confession of Frank Thorogood. An old army buddy of Tom Keylock—the burly former paratrooper who worked for the Stones as road manager, chauffeur and Jones's unofficial minder—Thorogood had already worked on Keith Richards's country house and seemed an obvious choice to renovate Cotchford Farm. Keylock claimed to have visited the 68-year-old Thorogood in the hospital in November 1993, where his friend made a startling admission: He had killed Brian Jones. But before Keylock could find out more from him, Thorogood died.

Anna Wohlin, in 1999's *The Murder of Brian Jones*, also points the finger squarely at Thorogood. Wohlin, a Swedish dancer living at Cotchford in the weeks preceding Jones's death, helped retrieve his body from the pool. Currently running a clothes store in Sweden, she claims that at the time she was too scared to speak out.

Now, these rumors are being publicly debated once more. Stephen Woolley, the veteran British movie producer behind hits such as *Interview With the Vampire* and *The Crying Game*, has directed *Stoned*, a movie about Jones's life and death—which fingers Thorogood as the killer. Meanwhile, amateur investigator Trevor Hobley—who was asked in 2002 by Jones's ex-girlfriend Pat Andrews to run the Brian Jones Fan Club—has concluded there were multiple parties involved in Jones's death. Earlier this year, he delivered a 150-page dossier of evidence to Sussex police in the hope of getting the original verdict declared unsafe and the case reopened.

"Everyone has a theory," says Rawlings. "It's like Kennedy: Was there a man on the grassy knoll?"

"EVERYONE HAS A THEORY. IT'S LIKE KENNEDY: WAS THERE A MAN ON THE GRASSY KNOLL?" TERRY RAWLINGS

BRIAN JONES ALWAYS attracted trouble. Growing up in the comfortable, conservative town of Cheltenham, he was a charismatic nonconformist with two great passions: music and sex. By the time he moved to London at 19, he was a fast-rising blues and jazz guitarist with three illegitimate children by different women and a prodigious appetite for drugs.

In 1962, Jones formed and christened the Rolling Stones with two younger musicians, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. From the start he was not only the band's leader but also its most multitalented musician and compelling character. But as the Stones' success grew, his position became increasingly shaky: He couldn't write songs, and his drug use made him increasingly unreliable both in the studio and on the road. Matters reached a head during a trip to Morocco in 1967 when his violent behavior toward his girlfriend, Swedish model Anita Pallenberg, drove her into the arms of Richards. Meanwhile, his drug convictions supposedly prevented him from joining the band on their tours of the U.S.

"Researching this over the years, I've not found very many people who liked him," says author Terry Rawlings. Recently, Keith Richards was asked if he would bring Jones back from the dead if he could. "I wouldn't want to bring him back," the guitarist snapped. "He was an asshole."

In early June 1969, Jagger, Richards and drummer Charlie Watts visited Cotchford to inform Jones that he was no longer a Rolling Stone, offering him a generous severance payment and a further sum for every year the band stayed together.

By that point, Jones's years of indulgence had taken their toll; he was putting on weight and his liver was twice its healthy size. He loathed being alone and invited a steady stream of musicians and hangers-on to play and party with him at Cotchford. But during his last weeks, he had only two constant companions: Anna Wohlin and Frank Thorogood.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HAFENRICHTER/REX; BETTMAN/CORBIS; BRIAN RASIC/REX

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Director Stephen Woolley is intrigued by the relationship between Jones and Thorogood. An eloquent 49-year-old with a long, graying ponytail, Woolley grew up in a working-class London family during the 1960s. Perched on a sofa in his film company's London offices, he told *Blender* about his childhood passion for the Stones and his subsequent fascination with Jones's last days. "I always saw Brian and Frank as metaphors for society at the time. [Frank] had fought in the Second World War and come back to a London full of bombsites. When the whole teenage thing began, it was that generation of guys who were left out. Brian represented the hedonism and experimentation of the time and Frank represented the past. I wanted to be like Brian but was living in a world of Frank."

Ravaged by drugs, Jones was notoriously paranoid and by July 1969 was convinced that Thorogood and his team were cheating him out of money he could ill afford to lose. "They think I'm a millionaire or something, but I'm not," he complained to Tony Sanchez. He told friends that he intended to fire Thorogood, and didn't pay the contractors their wages on July 2.

Woolley and Rawlings both believe this was why Jones and Thorogood's strained relationship exploded into violence—and that the debauched star was killed accidentally by his resentful employee. It was established during the original investigation that the two were drinking in the farmhouse until 10 P.M., when they joined Wohlin in the pool for a swim. In her book, Wohlin writes that the two men began arguing. Jones teasingly pulled Thorogood underwater and Thorogood retaliated in kind. "You are nothing but a stuck-up, no-good, whimpering rock star!" he shouted at Jones.

After a while, Lawson came out and told Wohlin she was wanted on the phone. She was still on the line when she heard Lawson screaming for help. As she ran out of the house, she passed Thorogood in the kitchen, with a towel around his shoulders, shaking so badly that he could hardly light his cigarette. Stephen Woolley thinks the mystery around Jones's death simply conceals roughhousing that went wrong. "I think it's human nature and not major conspiracy theories," he says. "Brian died through neglect. Nobody really cared about him."

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SO WAS JONES'S death just a dreadful accident? Not according to another, more radical theory, proposed by Trevor Hobley and Pat Andrews. Andrews is a vivacious, talkative 60-year-old who bore Jones's third child, Mark Julian Jones, in 1961. She first began investigating his death after reading Nicholas Fitzgerald's book in 1985 and met Trevor Hobley when he was a researcher working on a book about Keith Richards. "Logically it doesn't fit together," she told *Blender* over coffee one afternoon in a London hotel bar. "I do wish I could find out, because I think his memory deserves that."

She admits that she feels obligated to discover the truth because she last saw Jones in 1964 and wasn't with him during his most difficult period. "I kept saying to myself, 'If only I had been there, would things have been different?' I would have curtailed Brian's drug use. Maybe he would still be alive. That's a terrible burden to bear."

In Hobley, she has a tenacious ally. A man with a colourful résumé—naval officer, entrepreneur, researcher—he has devoted the last two years and all of his savings to the case. "It's taken over my life," he says. "I've been working 24/7."

Hobley believes that Anna Wohlin and Janet Lawson have still not told the truth. He contends that Jones was rendered unconscious—by people he declines to name—in Cotchford's music room and was carried, bleeding from the head, to the poolside, where he was drowned in a trough of water.

Hobley is convinced that Brian Jones's death was premeditated. "I don't think that any of the Rolling Stones knew anything at that time, but I think there were people within the Stones organization whose vested interests were in danger if Brian got his way. I believe the conspiracy stretches back to 1967 and I'm within a cat's whisker of proving that." He wants Jones's body, which he believes was embalmed, to be exhumed and subjected to a full forensic analysis.

The surviving Rolling Stones have always maintained that there was no foul play at all. "If he wasn't murdered, then there's no movie," Jagger said recently. "I mean, spare me. It's just to make money."

Sussex police seem to agree with him. A spokesman told *Blender*: "The case was recently reviewed by a senior detective. There is no credible evidence to suggest the coroner's verdict was incorrect. We will not be reopening the case."

Hobley and Andrews, however, are still optimistic that they will find the final piece of evidence that will force the police to act. Meanwhile, Brian Jones's loyal fans continue to speculate about what their hero would have done had he survived that mysterious July night. But Terry Rawlings has his own theory. "I think he would have looked awful, made some terrible experimental music and died anyway. Some people just aren't going to make it," he shrugs. "And he was one of them." [BLENDER]

THE CONTRACTOR, IN THE POOL, WITH THE SPEED...

WHO'S WHO IN THE BRIAN JONES WHODUNIT

PAT ANDREWS
An early girlfriend of Jones's and mother of his third child, Mark. She last saw Jones in 1964. Now 60, she has been investigating his death since 1985.

TREVOR HOBLEY
An amateur investigator and former Royal Navy officer who has run the Brian Jones fan club since 2002.

TOM KEYLOCK
The Rolling Stones' chauffeur and fix-it man—and Brian Jones's unofficial minder. WWII veteran nicknamed "Mr. Get-It-Together."

TERRY RAWLINGS
Rock journalist; author of comprehensive Jones conspiracy theory book *Who Killed Christopher Robin?*

ANNA WOHLIN
Jones's girlfriend at the time of his death, author of *The Murder of Brian Jones*. A former model and dancer, she now runs a clothing store in Stockholm.

FRANK THOROGOOD
Burly contractor who lived at Jones's house while overseeing its remodeling; an old war buddy of Tom Keylock. Died in 1993 at age 68.

STEPHEN WOOLLEY
Veteran British film producer and child of the '60s. Director of the new Brian Jones movie, *Stoned*.

ANDREWS, HOBLEY: TREVOR HOBLEY; RAWLINGS, MOLLY RAWLINGS; WOOLLEY: CATRINA ERIC/GAMMA; THOROGOOD: MIRRORPIX; WOHLIN: POPPERFOTO.COM; KEYLOCK: MIRRORPIX; JONES: MONITOR PICTURES LIBRARY/RETNA; MAGNIFYING GLASS: SIEDE PRESS/GETTY IMAGES; GAME PIECES: HARRY POCIUS

Ask Blender

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

WHO WAS THE FIRST BLACK ACT WITH A VIDEO ON MTV?

DAVID CHANG, SAN FRANCISCO

There were occasional black faces on the music video network before Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" broke down the doors once and for all in 1983, but not many. Responding to Rick James's loud accusations of racism, the channel pointed to their support for two acts: The Bus Boys, the black rock & roll act that opened for Eddie Murphy's infamous Delirious tour (and were later featured on the *Ghostbusters* soundtrack), and Musical Youth, the British child reggae band whose 1982 hit "Pass the Dutchie" reworked the Mighty Diamonds' pro-marijuana song "Pass the Kouchie." Whether either of these two acts was the first black act aired has been lost to history, but Musical Youth were definitely the first to appear in MTV's studios.

This claim to fame did the boys little good. Since the band's early days, one member was committed to a mental hospital, one died after turning to crime and all lost most of their money. They also got to make friends with Michael Jackson. "I was one of those kids that's been in his bedroom," keyboard player Michael Grant recently recalled, "and nothing untoward happened."

WHO INVENTED THE WORD "CRUNK"?

GERRY CAMPBELL, TEANECK, NJ

That's debatable, but it's not Lil Jon. The Dirty South rap term is often defined as a mid-'90s jamming together of either "crazy" and "drunk" or "crazy" and "funk" or "chronic" and "drunk" (or any other combination of the above). Another, rather weirder, theory holds that the creators were Conan O'Brien and Andy Richter: In the *Late Night* show's early days, they used "krunk" as a dirty-sounding new swear word that station execs would not know to bleep. One particular 1994 episode features a variety of stars employing the term, including rapper Ice-T declaring: "Wow, that's krunked up, man."

But the earlier, even more unlikely, king of crunk was actually ... Dr. Seuss! No, really. In a lesser-known 1972 book, *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!*, the master of crazy-assed nonsense asks the overstaying Mr. Mooney (probably a jibe at President Nixon) to leave, and recommends ways to do so, including a Zike-Bike and Bumble-Boat. Then he declares: "You can go on stilts. You can go by fish. You can go in a Crunk-Car if you wish."

The accompanying illustration shows a crunk-car looking ... well, crazy and drunk, actually.

OKAY, ONCE AND FOR ALL: DID KURT COBAIN WRITE THE HOLE ALBUM *LIVE THROUGH THIS*?

ZHENG NG, NOME, AK

Accusations that Cobain authored Hole's 1994 album have often been leveled. The supporting evidence? *Live Through This* sounds like no other Hole record; many songs fit the quiet verse/loud chorus *Nevermind* template; Cobain's longstanding interest in dolls clearly influenced the track "Doll Parts"; and according to one old rumor, a tape exists of Cobain singing all the album's songs. (Geffen, the label of both bands, responded officially that "Kurt was at some of the sessions and helped with background on some of the songs, but that was the extent of it.") Given the collaborative nature of Cobain's relationship with Courtney Love (they shared a journal), it's likely that Cobain had some degree of involvement in the composition. But Cobain's biographer Charles R. Cross lays out a more complex story, claiming that Love helped shape the lyrics to Nirvana's *In Utero*: "Heart-Shaped Box" and "Pennyroyal Tea" are, in particular, virtual co-writes. Maybe the best course is to quote Kurt's inadvertent explanation on "Milk It": "We feed off of each other."

Kurt: "I wonder if my drug dealer accepts guitars?"

IS IT TRUE THAT JOHN DENVER WAS ALMOST IN THE BYRDS?

MOHAMMAD CABDI, PURDY, MO

That's right. When the first lineup was being assembled, the future country-pop superstar—and one of the biggest-selling American solo acts of the '70s, no less—was briefly considered as a fourth voice alongside Roger McGuinn, David Crosby and Gene Clark. In his autobiography, Denver (who was killed in 1997 after crashing his own plane) recalled that McGuinn visited L.A. folk club Ledbetter's one night to hear him. If the idea of Crosby and Denver harmonizing together sounds strange today, the match was pretty ill-starred at the time too. Denver recalled Crosby as being "the most arrogant, obnoxious person I'd ever met."

I HEARD THAT WHEN CHUCK BERRY WAS IN PRISON, HE SERVED TIME WITH THE BIRDMAN OF ALCATRAZ. TRUE OR FALSE?

SHARONDA MATHEWS, BIRMINGHAM, AL

True. In 1961, Chuck Berry was convicted of transporting a 14-year-old girl over state lines, and completed his incarceration at the Federal Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri, where infamous murderer/bird expert Robert Stroud was also enrolled following years of solitary confinement at Alcatraz. One Berry biography claims Stroud would have heard the rock originator composing future classics like "The Promised Land" and "You Never Can Tell."

More certainly, during Berry's time there, actor Burt Lancaster paid a visit to the penitentiary to research his Oscar-nominated role playing Stroud in the classic 1962 movie *Birdman of Alcatraz*. Berry was released on October 18, 1963, and Stroud died just over a month later. [BLENDER]

YOUR QUESTIONS

***Ask Blender**, 1040 Sixth Avenue, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018*

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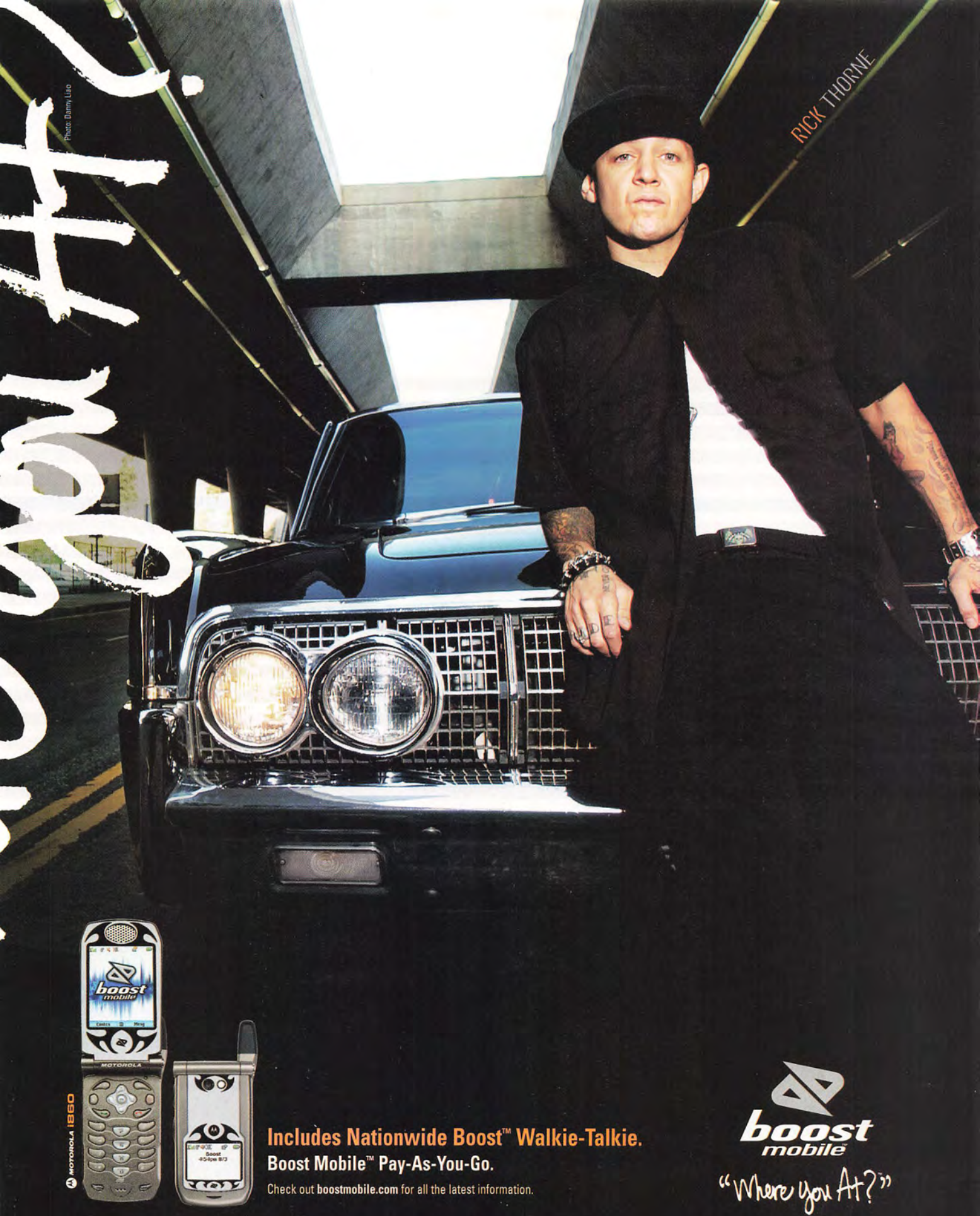
Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province.

COBAIN: GULLICK ARCHIVE/IDOLS; DR. SEUSS: HARRY POCIUS



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SISTER ACT 2

FOR HER TWENTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY, ASHLEE SIMPSON GOT HER FREAK ON IN VEGAS *AND* PROVED THAT SHE COULD—YES—SING! *BLENDER* WAS WITH HER EVERY TEQUILA-FUELED STEP OF THE WAY

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY MANDLER

"Yeah, so I have a pet fluorescent light. What of it?"

SHIRT BY **D&G** TIGHTS BY **WOLFORD** BRA BY **AGENT PROVOCATEUR** JEWELRY BY **LOREE RODKIN**

STYLIST: JESSICA PASTER FOR MAGNET; SET DESIGN: DAVID ROSS; HAIR: KEN PAVES FOR STYLE MANAGEMENT USING PAVES PROFESSIONAL; MAKEUP: MARY PHILLIPS FOR STYLE MANAGEMENT USING CHANTECAILLE BEAUTY

"I'M SORRY," Ashlee Simpson says, slumping her shoulders and rubbing softly at her throat. "Can we try this song again?"

It's late afternoon at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Outside, the strip is broiling in 93-degree October heat. In the shadows cast by giant casinos, middle-aged couples with fannypacks pass men in T-shirts that read GIRLS DIRECT TO YOU IN HOURS. This is Sin City, where Ashlee Simpson has decided to ring in that most sinful of birthdays, No. 21.

She's celebrating it in fantastically Simpsonian fashion. Ashlee has invited her parents, her older sister Jessica, some close friends from L.A., *That '70s Show* star Wilmer Valderrama and an MTV camera crew. They have been following her all day for a reality special called *Live and Legal*, and they will document every flute of champagne and shot of Jägermeister she downs—even the third one, served well after midnight, which she will spill all over her hair.

Right now, the reality crew is taping a fake concert that Ashlee's giving to a fake audience. The dance floor of Pure, Caesars' nightclub, is only one-sixth full, populated with 60 or so extras the club wrangled for the occasion. It's an odd moment of scripted reality that suits Las Vegas, where to look at a single block of the strip is to see at least 12 impossible versions of "reality" collide: a 540-foot-tall Eiffel Tower stands a stone's throw from a midget Statue of Liberty; a fake Persian palace tucked into a fake mountainside boasts authentic Chinese cuisine; a marquee announces that Howie Mandel still has fans ...

Inside Pure, though, at least one thing isn't fake: Ashlee Simpson is singing, and—haters, consider yourselves warned—she sounds great. Her voice is raspy but rich, curling up around a melodramatic ballad from her new album, *I Am Me*, called "Catch Me When I Fall." But she's unhappy with how she sounds and, one verse into the next song, a pogo-punk number called "Coming Back for More," she cuts it short. She tells her band to stop and calls a conference at the front of the stage with Joe, her father and manager, and Tina, her mom. Joe shakes his head solemnly and Tina says something sympathetic about the strain that nonstop touring and desert heat can put on the voice. Ashlee wipes the pout from her face and gives it another go. "I don't know where my head's at," she says. "Here's fucking 'Coming Back for More'!"

When Ashlee's done, Tina rubs her daughter's shoulders offstage and, seeing that two long, blonde extensions have come loose from her head, tugs them free. It's strange to see a 21-year-old girl's hair coming out in clumps. Even if it isn't actually her hair.

"Ashlee's hard on herself," Joe Simpson tells *Blender*, flashing a brilliant, what-can-you-do? smile. He pauses for a second and then decides to correct himself, adding a note of gravitas to his affable, Clintonian drawl. "The *world* has made her hard on herself."

●●●●●

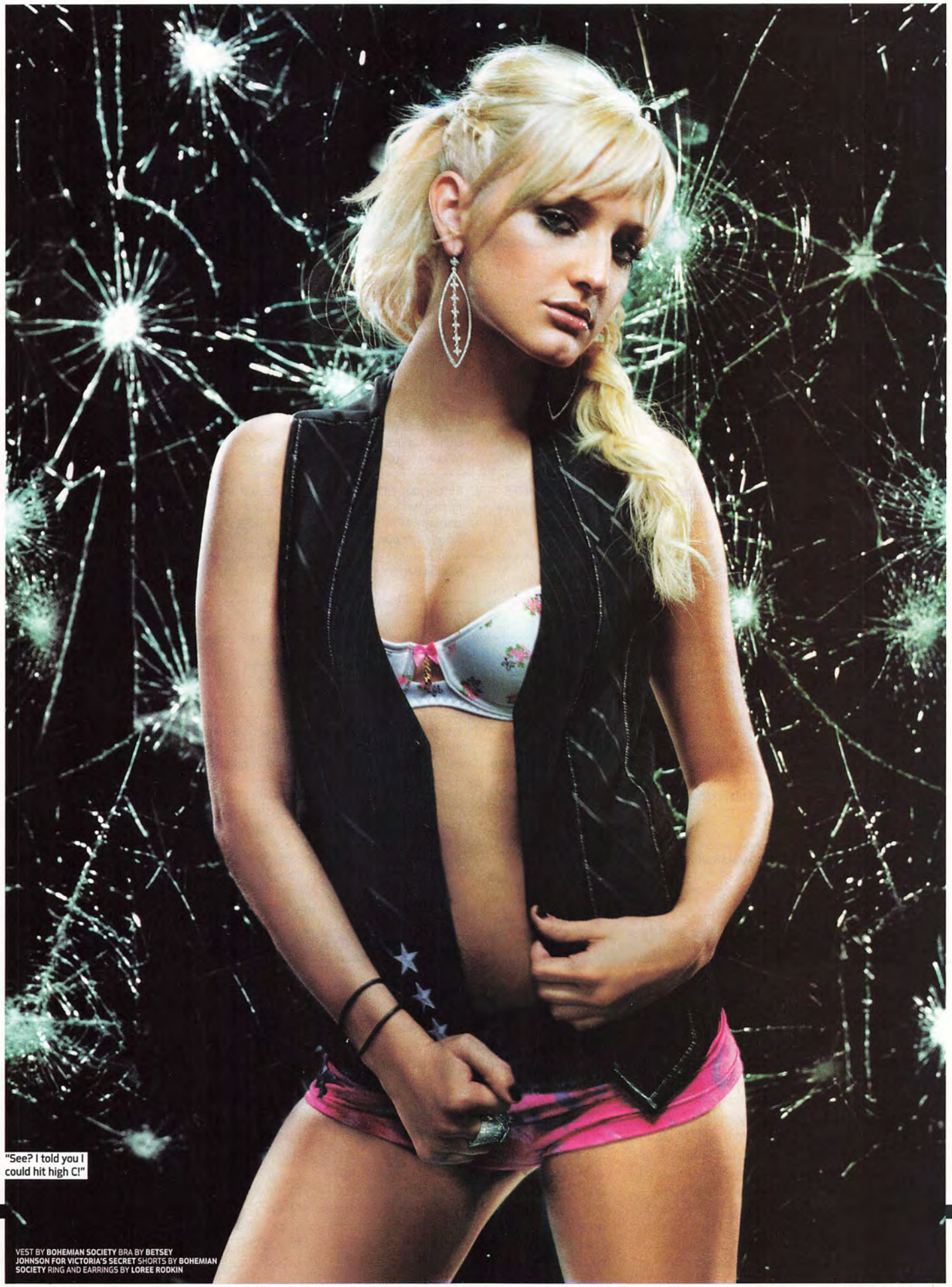
ASHLEE SIMPSON had her first fantasy of fame when she was 4, the daughter of a Richardson, Texas, youth minister and an aerobics instructor mom who home-schooled her. "I wanted to be a Broadway star," Ashlee says. "I grew up around gospel music, so I was always singing and I was always putting on little shows—I was never a shy girl."

It was Jessica, though, who got to the limelight first. In 1995, she put together an album of songs that Joe peddled around the Christian youth circuit. One of her demos reached an A&R rep at Columbia, who signed her in 1997. Joe left ministering for managing, but he says it's not that hard to balance the roles of dad and tough bizzer: "All I am is a desperate father. I love my children and would do everything for them."

With Jessica's star rising, Ashlee, whose attention had shifted to dancing—and who was the youngest student ever accepted at the School of American Ballet—was forced to move with her family to Los Angeles. There she became a backup dancer for Jessica.

"PEOPLE WAIT FOR A YOUNG GIRL LIKE ME, A SIMPSON, TO FALL ON HER FACE."

For Ashlee, who calls her 'tween years her "gangly phase, before I grew into my face," this contributed to an adolescence-long insecurity that she says she's still coming to terms with. In her 2004 single, "Shadow," she sang about feeling ugly and having a famous, Barbie-hot sister who dominated her parents' attention. "There's a side of myself that's still insecure, →



"See? I told you I could hit high C!"

VEST BY **BOHEMIAN SOCIETY** BRA BY **BETSEY JOHNSON FOR VICTORIA'S SECRET** SHORTS BY **BOHEMIAN SOCIETY** RING AND EARRINGS BY **LOREE RODKIN**

PLATINUM RECORDS

YOUR GUIDE TO YOUNG HOLLYWOOD'S IT-BLONDES

BY VICTORIA DE SILVERIO

	PARIS HILTON	KIMBERLY STEWART	NICOLE RICHIE	LINDSAY LOHAN	ASHLEE SIMPSON
AGE	24	26	24	19	21
DAY JOB	Celebrity	Hellraising Tommy Hilfiger model	Reality TV sidekick	**DISNEY INGÉNUE**	Pop star
MOONLIGHTING AS	Actress, model, author, perfumer, club owner, cheeseburger shill, pop singer	Paris understudy	Bard (*The Truth About Diamonds: A Novel*)	Bearer of tortured soul in popular song ("Confessions of a Broken Heart")	Actress (*Undiscovered*)
SOURCE OF UNIMAGINABLE WEALTH	Hilton hotel fortune	Father Rod Stewart's $100 million estate	Adopted (wink!) father Lionel Richie's $200 million estate	12-year-old girls, their horny older brothers	**JESSICA SIMPSON'S DNA**
PUBLIC HUMILIATION	Blowing Internet entrepreneur Rick Solomon	Calling **JENNIFER ANISTON** "homely" in *Blender*	Getting dissed by Paris, forcing her to brave celebrity without her *Simple Life* partner	Dying her red hair blond (coinciding with her breasts suddenly deflating)	Acid-reflux-induced *SNL* hoedown
BFF	Her sister Nicky	Paris	Mischa Barton	Nicole	Rumer Willis (Bruce and Demi's daughter)
FOE	Nicole	Nicole	Food	Ashlee	Lindsay
DEGREES TO WILMER VALDERRAMA	Three. He's the ex-boyfriend of Lindsay, friend of Nicole, Paris's ex-best friend	Four. He's the ex-boyfriend of her best friend's ex-best friend's friend	Two. He's the **EX-BOYFRIEND** of Lindsay	One. Ex-boyfriend	One. Friend with benefits
WHEN NOT CLUBBING, CAN BE FOUND AT ...	Kitson for clothes; Kate Somerville salon for eyelash extensions	Kitson for clothes; Kate Somerville salon for eyelash extensions	Kitson for clothes; Kate Somerville salon for eyelash extensions	Kitson for clothes; Kate Somerville salon for eyelash extensions	Kitson for clothes; Kate Somerville salon for **EYELASH EXTENSIONS**
LAP DOG	Bambi (chihuahua)	Bentley (Chihuahua)	Honey Child (Shih Tzu) and Foxy Cleopatra (Pomeranian)	Her chronically apologetic felon-father, Michael	Ryan Cabrera
IF SHE WERE AN INANIMATE OBJECT SHE'D BE ...	**A McMANSION**	Paris Hilton	A pipe cleaner	A miracle elixir that both reduces your weight and increases your party stamina	The Be-Dazzler

but I don't tear myself up," she says. "I think it keeps me normal and real."

In October of 2002, Jessica married former 98 Degrees boy-bander Nick Lachey, and Joe and MTV struck on the idea for *Newlyweds*, the reality hit that transformed his eldest daughter from a teen-pop also-ran into an endearingly befuddled TV star. In 2003, he convinced MTV to document Ashlee's attempt to make it as a singer. *The Ashlee Simpson Show* followed the then-19-year-old through the process—vocal struggles, boyfriend struggles, hairdo struggles—of making her first album, *Autobiography*, and introduced Ashlee as a raven-haired tomboy unafraid to curse at her parents and burp real loud. "Jessica's so well put together, and I've always been a mess," laughs Ashlee. (Today they're both blonde—Ashlee says she feels "lighter," and wanted her hair to match that.)

The SimpsonGloboTeen5000 proved a well-oiled machine, helping to turn both of Joe's daughters into multimedia superstars. Then, for one unbelievably long minute on October 23 last year, the SimpsonGloboTeen5000 went haywire. Suffering from three vocal-cord nodes, Ashlee appeared on *Saturday Night Live* to perform two songs. Since her voice was weak, it was decided she would sing along to a backing track. When it came time for the second song, however, the vocals for the first played again—with Ashlee's mic nowhere near her mouth. She improvised a jig that suggested *The Muppets Do Riverdance*, then walked off the stage. "I felt an overwhelming sadness," says Joe Simpson. "I saw this child being stuck with this thing—someone else pushed the wrong button, wasn't her, but she had to pay for it."

Ashlee's rhythm guitarist, Braxton Olita, describes the scene backstage as "total chaos." "People I'd seen a half hour before standing around calmly were just behaving like apes," he recalls. Within hours of the broadcast, Ashlee's snafu had been com- →

HILTON: GADD-ALLSTAR/GLOBE PHOTOS; STEWART: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE.COM; RICHIE: KEVIN PARRY; LOHAN: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE.COM; ASHLEE SIMPSON: SHAWN EHLERS/WIREIMAGE.COM; MICKEY MOUSE EARS: RONALD ASADOMAN/SPLASH; AMSTON: MIKE WEBSTER/REX USA; JESSICA SIMPSON: BARRY KING/WIREIMAGE.COM; VALDERRAMA: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM; MANSION: H. SPICHTINGER/ZEFA/CORBIS; EYELASHES: PAUL JANSEN/CORBIS

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Yes, she can sing—but can she wallpaper?

pressed into a .WMV file and rapidly replaced the video of that fat kid jumping around with a lightsaber as the Most Forwarded Link in the Universe. Making things worse, Ashlee seemed to play the blame game, explaining that her band "played the wrong song," then citing acid reflux for the mishap—which sounded more like a plug for Nexium than a convincing argument. ("I was never blaming my band," Ashlee insists. "We were like, 'We're in this together.'")

Today, Ashlee has a conflicted response to that night. On the one hand, she's humbly philosophical: "*SNL* was a defining place of my womanhood, falling flat on my face and finding inner strength to be like, OK, I have to step up to the plate, not crawl into a shell." On the other, she's indignant: "I think it's sad for our nation that CNN was covering this 20-year-old girl's ... incident, especially while there's a war going on."

Why do you think everyone pounced on you?

"I'm a Simpson," she says after thinking a bit. "I had a reality show, my album was doing really well, and people wait for somebody, a young girl like me, to fall on her face."

Do you think your being a girl had something to do with the relish people took in your performance?

"Totally. It was these older men who were hating. Women were supporting me. If I wasn't a girl, it probably would have been different."

It does seem that part of the *schadenfreude* Ashleegate inspired had to do with the fact that she's a girl making rock (one with a passing fondness for tank tops that say PUNK in sparkly letters), and rock is still, by and large, a boy's club. After *SNL*, the club had found its new Britney, its new disco: a "pre-fabricated," "no-talent fraud" to symbolize Everything Wrong With Music Today.

Ashlee—well-raised girl that she is—stifles a giant yawn when *Blender* winds on about rockism, postmodernism and the metaphysics of authenticity in praising her excellent 21st-century pop. She only wishes that the boys who insist on giving her such a hard time would take a cue from their girlfriends.

"If they gave my music a chance," she says, "maybe they'd be dancing in their rooms too."

• • • • •

WHEN THE CLOCK strikes midnight in Las Vegas, Ashlee heads into Pure's VIP lounge with a team of handlers and crew following her like metal shavings after a magnet. Since her afternoon performance, she has gone back up to her room to change into a slinky black minidress, fishnets and screaming red high heels. "I feel like I've come into my womanhood"—maturity is a recurring theme this weekend—"I don't like to look like a whore, but it's nice to feel sexy."

"I DON'T LIKE TO LOOK LIKE A WHORE, BUT IT'S NICE TO FEEL SEXY," ASHLEE SAYS.

We mention a quote Joe Simpson gave an interviewer about Jessica late last year, when he stated, "If you put her in a T-shirt or you put her in a bustier, she's sexy in both. She's got *double Ds*! You can't cover those suckers up!"

Is it strange to hear your father talk about your sister like that?

"My dad's not saying it in a weird way," Ashlee says. "It's just something Jessica's had to deal with her whole life. When we were younger, she would sing in church, just wearing a T-shirt, and people would be like, 'She's showing too much.' She wasn't: She's just got big boobs. He's standing up for her, if anything.

"He doesn't have to say it about me," she adds. "But actually, I got lucky with my wonderful breasts. I feel like that's my best asset."

Ashlee's favorite birthday present tonight is from Jessica, a special edition Rolex from upscale jewelers Chrome Hearts, "with diamonds everywhere." For the record, Ashlee denies the reports of her sister's impending divorce from Nick Lachey: "They're in Italy right now," she says four days later. "They're doing great." Ashlee has had her own share of tabloid coverage this year, too: She regularly appears alongside super-rich, super-blonde L.A. party girls like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan ("I love to go out and shake my booty," Ashlee concedes), but with a musical career that actually bears fruit, and without any rumors of bathroom-stall drug use. She is no longer dating Ryan Cabrera, the pop-rock softie whom Joe also manages, but she has been recently linked to Lohan's former flame, Wilmer Valderrama (who will dance with her in Las Vegas into the early morning of her birthday). "I'm not dating anyone right now," she sighs. "I haven't met anybody in a while." →

PHARRELL

"IN MY MIND..."

IN STORES NOV. 2005

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Joe, Jessica and Tina help celebrate Ashlee's 21st.

"Daaaaaarling!" Ashlee in Vegas.

With Wilmer Valderrama at Caesars Palace.

Ashlee's second-favorite gift is the vintage Ms. Pac-Man arcade game Joe and Tina bought her for her brand new, $4.5 million L.A. home. Among the house's other accommodations are three Red Bull vending machines that Ashlee has restocked regularly. "It's 9,000 square feet, and really peaceful," Ashlee says. "I live with my friends Nicole and Kathy. They're amazing, very clean, and I have a maid three times a week—she's adorable. It's hard to find a good maid in L.A."

Shimmying in the VIP section to 50 Cent's "In da Club," Ashlee holds a glass of champagne poured from a bottle of Dom Pérignon the size of Horatio Sanz's thigh. "I have to be normal for a second and have a drink," she says, alluding to the fact that she's been mugging for MTV all day—the first time they've followed her since her show's second season finished taping in February. "This makes me not miss the reality show," she says. Thankfully, she has tomorrow to herself—she will spend it, as it turns out, sleeping off a massive hangover and getting up around 7 P.M. to drink "more Dom" with dinner.

"I could handle the champagne," she says later, shaking her head ruefully. "But not the tequila."

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IF YOU PERFORM a Google search for "Ashlee Simpson" and "excited," it yields more than 148,000 hits. Some of these come from gushing fans and some are random, but the vast majority illustrate just how often Ashlee expresses glee.

"I am so excited about it," she said in one interview about *Autobiography*. "I'm really excited for you all to hear it," she wrote on her website about *I Am Me*. "I'm so excited to be here," she said during her first *Late Late Show* appearance. "I'm excited to be a Candie's girl," she said last year, after signing a contract to model for the footwear company.

On *The Ashlee Simpson Show*, "I'm really excited," was a frequent refrain, as was "positive experience," which Ashlee often employed in the show's confessional segments, while reflecting on strenuous pilates lessons and other daily pop-star adventures.

"I can't have negativity around me," Ashlee says, sipping coffee in the lounge of New York's Ritz-Carlton hotel. She's wearing black tights and a baggy argyle sweater, and her eyes, deep blue, are ringed with black eyeliner drawn to points. Twenty-one-years-and-forty-eight-hours old, she is in town to perform on *Saturday Night Live*, yet another reason that this is Ashlee's Best Week Ever: In the span of just a few days, she has outgrown her fake ID and will return—acid-reflux- and backing-track-free—to the scene of the crime at *SNL*. She says the pressure on her is unbelievably high, but that she feels ... excited.

"I HAD TO PROVE TO MY FANS THAT I'M REAL."

If she seems perennially upbeat, Ashlee says, that's thanks in part to a dead woman named Florence. After the lip-synching fiasco, Ashlee turned to a series of early-20th-century Christian self-help books penned by the American writer Florence Scovel-Shinn. "There's this one called *The Game of Life and How to Play It*," Ashlee says. "Great, great book. It's about dealing with life, brushing it off your shoulders and making the situation what you want it to be. Envisioning the picture and how it could be a bigger picture. Not letting negativity in. That's something I had to focus on: positive energy instead of negative energy.

"The day after *SNL* happened," she continues, "I called my grandma, crying, and she told me that 99% of everything you do is attitude. She had that on her refrigerator, and that really helped."

Tina Simpson likes to compare Ashlee's ups and downs to a recent movie. "On the flight into Las Vegas, they played *Seabiscuit*," she says, recalling the film about an underdog Depression-era racehorse that eventually triumphed. "I was watching, and it hit me: Ashlee *is* Seabiscuit!"

Seabiscuit aside, Ashlee Simpson's past year has had a lot in common with the plot of *Groundhog Day*, the comedy in which Bill Murray is forced to relive the same day until he becomes a better person. For Ashlee, it was one minute, not one day, that she was forced to relive endlessly, and the experience taught her that she had to make her voice stronger. The Simpsons brought in Ron Anderson, a vocal coach who's helped Shania Twain and Ozzy Osbourne. Ashlee says she works with him all the time—"they fly him out, or she does it over the phone, or even over iChat," says Olita, her rhythm guitarist. Ashlee adds that she drinks tea daily and has largely banished cheese, marinara sauce and ketchup from her diet—and what do you know? Her nodes are gone, and Ashlee's voice is stronger than ever. "I had to prove to my fans that I'm real," Ashlee says.

Her fans, it appears, never doubted her. In late September, Ashlee played a small concert at New York's Supper Club to debut songs from *I Am Me*. Joe Simpson watched from up in the balcony, tossing autographs to screeching fans below, while Ashlee's label president, Jordan Schur, cheered her on—"Rivers Cuomo from Weezer told me he loves her record!" he chirps. Ashlee hopped around the stage in a punk schoolgirl outfit that was one part Britney, one part Avril—her pop and rock sides personified. In attendance were two New Jersey Ashleeheads: Candace, 21, and Nicki, 20. "I saw her show on MTV, and I really liked her personality," Candace said. "She's just like us." Nicki dismissed *SNL* with a shrug and a wave of her T-Mobile Sidekick: "Her voice isn't polished. Who cares? Even the *SNL* thing seemed true to life."

●●●●●

ASHLEE'S NEW ALBUM, *I Am Me*, renders academic any questions about whether she deserves her success: Bridging rock, disco, new wave, rap and even

MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE.COM (3)

Jessica and Ashlee in 2000.

Jude Law commiserates with Ashlee on *SNL*, 2004.

Ashlee *singing* on *SNL*, October 2005.

TOP LEFT: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM

dub with giant hooks, it takes Ashlee into dynamic, Gwen-like, pop-juggling territory. It's ambitious, and suggests that, like Justin Timberlake and Christina Aguilera before her, Ashlee has her sights set on growing out of the feverish but fickle *TRL* set and proving herself as a career artist. "We had to hold her back from the places she wanted to go to," says Joe Simpson. "If you change too fast, you leave behind the people that love you."

On *SNL*, take two, Ashlee got that much closer to putting the scandal behind her for good—the only error of the night was her choice to wear her hair in dreadlocks. After a defiant performance of the howling "Boyfriend," she even did a little jig during the curtain call, as if to say, "Get over it. I am."

"Boyfriend" is *I Am Me*'s lead single, a punky love triangle jam built around the snarl, "I didn't steal your boyfriend." It's perfect for the age of Brad/Jennifer/Angelina, Paris/Mary-Kate/Stavros and ... Lindsay/Wilmer/Ashlee? "It's not about anyone in particular," Ashlee laughs, adding that she hasn't heard anything from Lohan about the song.

One lyric on the album, though, is distinctly downbeat, and suggests a dark answer to the question of what Ashlee is really like without the cameras around. "When the lights are off," Ashlee sings, "something's killing me." *What's killing you?* we ask, and Ashlee's answer is a fleeting but chilly glimpse into an existential despair you hardly expect from a Simpson sister: "When everything's gone—the cameras, your makeup, this, that—there's this empty feeling," she says. "Did all these people working with me today really care about me? Was that real? What's real, what's not real? My music: Am I good enough? Everyone's looking at me, but I'm looking inward, and it's so weird."

She stares at the floor, then snaps her eyes back up. "It's just part of the job. You have to forget that part." [BLENDER]

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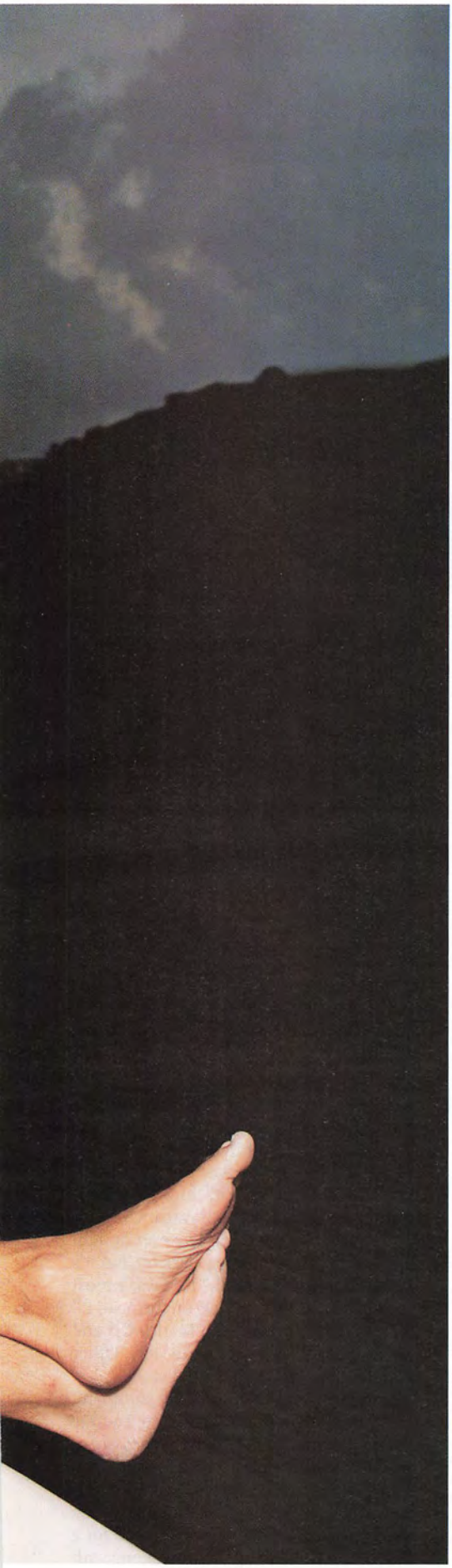


BIG FISH

STRESSED OUT FROM A YEAR IN WHICH HE RELEASED TWO ALBUMS, MOUNTED A $61 MILLION SUMMER TOUR AND SAW HIS QUICKIE MARRIAGE TO RENÉE ZELLWEGER TURN HIM INTO TABLOID FODDER, COUNTRY-ROCK TITAN KENNY CHESNEY RETREATS TO HIS ISLAND GETAWAY TO DO WHAT HE DOES BEST: NOTHING

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHANIEL WELCH

"WHAT GEAR ARE you in?"

That question is posed to *Blender* by a smiling Kenny Chesney aboard his 56-foot Sea Ray, currently drifting through the Caribbean on a lazy Wednesday morning. And just in case we didn't hear Chesney over the din of his yacht's twin diesel engines, the query is also printed on the ship's welcome mat.

"The goal," Chesney explains, "is to reach 'sixth gear,'" an advanced, almost transcendent state of drunkenness that generally requires physical assistance to get home. *Blender* confesses that our half-empty Corona is only our second, but then again, it's not even 11 A.M. For Chesney, country music's king of leisure, having fun isn't just a way of life; it's a challenge.

And having fun has never been more of a challenge than it is now, as his adopted home on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands is under siege from international paparazzi and suspicious lookie-loos.

Even though the 37-year-old Chesney has sold 20 million records, it took his surprise May marriage to actress Renée Zellweger to land him in the gossip pages. And the news that the couple was seeking an annulment on the hazy grounds of "fraud," announced just days before this booze cruise, set tongues wagging and birthed rumors as disparate as her leaving him for singer Damien Rice and him leaving her for, um, quarterback Peyton Manning.

"We've had to change the name of the boat so many times, we should just get a magnetic sign we can remove at will," Chesney says, equal parts amused and annoyed. Bald pate hidden beneath a backwards Houston Astros cap, he's not being paranoid. A speedboat called the *Nauti Nymph* approaches and slows down. Before the first snapshot can be taken, Ben, the yacht's captain and the caretaker of Chesney's house in St. John, leaps into a dinghy and races over to the interlopers.

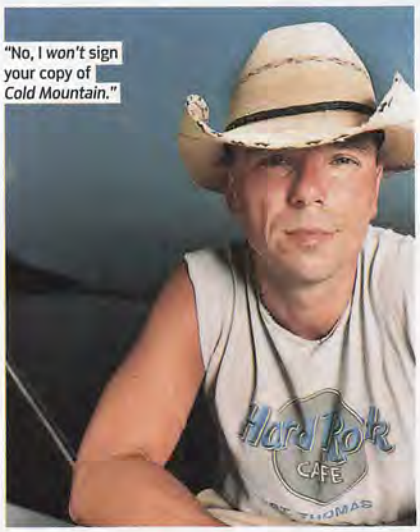
"This boat is not a tourist attraction," he tells them, politely but with a hint of menace. "Please do not take any photographs." The *Nauti Nypmh* lingers a moment before finally turning tail.

"The local charters tip off tourists and paparazzi," Ben later explains. His right arm bears a USMC tattoo. On the left: "Sixth Gear."

Chesney's bird-bath impression always kills.

IN COUNTRY MUSIC, where regular-guy populist charm is every bit as important as a good hook, Kenny Chesney is the people's champ, roaming the parking lots before his shows to throw back margaritas with the tailgaters who've paid to hear songs called "No Shirt, No Shoes, No Problems" and "Guitars and Tiki Bars." Chesney admits that he's at least partially to blame for drawing this morning's gawkers.

"It's my own damn fault," he says. "I've been promoting this lifestyle for years. On one hand, I'm excited that people not only enjoy the songs but the way I live my life and want to see it. It's getting tougher, sure. And as far as the paparazzi, they were never here before ... this thing ... happened, so I imagine they'll get sick of me once they realize there's only so much they can say." Chesney smirks as he sips a rum punch. "Paradise has its drawbacks."



"No, I *won't* sign your copy of *Cold Mountain*."

"THE PAPARAZZI WILL GET SICK OF ME ONCE THEY REALIZE THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH THEY CAN SAY."

His ninth album of Nashville arena rock, *The Road and the Radio*, hit stores in November, and a promotional schedule that should have been a smooth victory lap now isn't. Everyone wants to talk about what happened to his marriage—everyone except him. Right now he just wants to enjoy some warm friends and cold drinks, to catch a buzz and maybe a marlin.

Truth be told, the S.S. Currently Untitled is no fishing boat—the live well, a trough designed to stow fish, has been converted into an oversized beer cooler, complete with a customized fresh-water crushed-ice-maker. Forget the satellite TV or Sub-Zero fridge; this is Chesney's favorite amenity. And swank though it may be, the vessel is still modest by, say, Diddy standards—the TV isn't even a plasma. But this doesn't stop its humble owner from marveling at the extravagance.

"This is the one thing I've ever bought that I won't get my money back on, but it's more than paid for itself," he says, almost apologetically. "When I live on the boat, I'll fix breakfast, put on a Bob Marley CD and watch the sun move across the sky. Other than that, no two days are the same."

The crew for this morning's jaunt isn't here for sport, either; Chad and Todd—Todd's the one in the "Sixth Gear" cap—are 31-year-old twins from Missouri who own Woody's, Chesney's local watering hole of choice. It's late September, between tourist seasons, so Woody's is closed for a few weeks. Good thing, because along with

Chesney prepares to act out his favorite Led Zeppelin story.

Ben's wife Emily, most of the bar's wait staff is on board as well. Though their stories vary in the details, Ann, Caroline and Jessica, all in their 20s and adopting the moniker "Chesney's Angels" for the day, boast variations on the same "came here on vacation and never went back" theme.

"Ben, Todd and Chad are the first people I met on St. John," Chesney says. "There are a lot of people here who walk through the world in a different way."

Right now, their way is to lure fish by throwing handfuls of cat food into the water, not the first time an unorthodox method has been attempted. "We were in the Bahamas once and we used bologna as bait," recalls Ben. "Worked, too."

What Chesney's pals lack in fishing expertise, they more than make up for in loyalty, circling the wagons as their lives become increasingly host to unwelcome snoops. They concede that May 9, the day Chesney and Zellweger were wed on St. John, is etched into their collective memories as the day their quiet little enclave got a lot less quiet, yet no one has a bad word (or *any* word, really) to say about Zellweger.

So much for good old-fashioned trash-talking to heal a broken heart. If granted by a judge, the annulment will mean not that the marriage is over but that the marriage never even existed. And that's exactly the mood here: Never happened. The only trace of maudlin sentimentality comes from Chesney's iPod, currently playing through the stereo: Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)."

That's not to say that the relationship's aftermath isn't a topic of ridicule as third gear eases into fourth. Emily sits at the back of the boat, waving her legs in the air while Chesney preps the grill for some burgers. "Don't tempt me," he laughs. "I'm hard up." Chesney later poses for a photograph with his arm around Jessica and threatens to drag her into the tabloids as the "other woman" the paparazzi are so cravenly seeking. "Are you kidding?" she replies. "My parents would be *thrilled*."

Nor is it lost on Chesney that the peculiar terms of the annulment have led to speculation that the "other woman" might be a man, so he pretends to plant a kiss on Chad for another shot. "What the hell, people probably think I'm gay anyway." But when *Blender* amiably suggests that Chesney gut a fish onto the recent copy of *Us Weekly* with him and Zellweger on the cover, he doesn't respond. If you've been a guy's drinking buddy for years, you can help him through a rough spot by making light of it. If you've known him for one day? Not so much.

KENNY CHESNEY WAS an 18-year-old freshman at East Tennessee State University before he touched a guitar. "I never believe musicians when they say they knew they were gonna be a star at age 3," Chesney says. "Maybe LeAnn Rimes knew, maybe Mariah Carey. But I didn't want to be Hank Williams or Eddie Van Halen; I wanted to be Pete Rose." Horse racing aside, five-foot-six athletes aren't much in demand, so when Chesney's body stopped growing, his interest in music started. He played Tom Petty and John Mellencamp covers in a local Mexican restaurant, then gigged around campus. After graduating in 1991 with a degree in marketing, Chesney moved to Nashville. ➜

CRAZY COUNTRY COUPLES

KENNY & RENÉE ARE MERELY THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE OF ILL-FATED COUNTRY & WESTERN ROMANCES

HANK WILLIAMS AND BILLIE JEAN JONES ESHLIMAN

The country icon and his second wife were married on October 18, 1952, in a private affair. Rather less private were the two subsequent ceremonies Williams staged the following day in front of 14,000 paying customers. The couple's union was marred by the birth of Hank's illegitimate child, his morphine addiction and his death in the backseat of a Cadillac three months later.

TAMMY WYNETTE AND GEORGE JONES

"The President and First Lady of Country Music" met cute when Jones witnessed a fight between Wynette and husband No.3 and gallantly whisked her and her children away to so-called safety. After they wed, Wynette regularly hid the keys to their cars to prevent Jones from driving drunk, but the ever-resourceful Jones rode his mower to the liquor store.

LORETTA LYNN AND OLIVER LYNN

Loretta Lynn and moonshiner Oliver "Doo" Lynn were married when Lynn was just 13, and had four kids by the time she was 18. In her 48-year marriage, Lynn endured: countless beatings, a breakneck tour schedule designed by Doo (occasionally halting for hospitalizations due to exhaustion) and awkward family dinners resulting from his affair with their son's girlfriend.

GLENN CAMPBELL AND TANYA TUCKER

Tucker and Campbell met following a Vegas performance in 1980 and began a coke-fueled, violent relationship. Though never married, the May-December couple reached an unhappy ending when Campbell knocked Tucker's teeth out in front of their visiting families. Proof that what happens in Vegas should, in fact, stay in Vegas.

WILLIE NELSON AND SHIRLEY COLLIE

The honky-tonk toker and his already-married second wife met while recording duets for his *Willingly* LP in 1962. Fed up with Nelson's pot- and booze-fueled funk during his mid-'60s career nadir, the final straw was the maternity-ward bill Willie had racked up with his future third wife. Collie left Nelson around the time his house burned down, his label dropped him and his dog died, thus giving Willie enough material for decades of successful country songwriting.

ROY ROGERS AND TRIGGER

Having served as Rogers's trusty steed in all of his movies, Trigger was posthumously honored by Rogers, who mounted the horse's hide on plaster and placed it on display at the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum. Not to be outdone in utter creepiness, Rogers's second wife, Dale Evans, had her horse Buttermilk mounted, as well as the family dog. *LAUREN HARRIS*

ICON KEY MULTIPLE PARTNERS · DRINKIN' & DRUGGIN' · CHILD BRIDE · STUFFED HORSES · ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN

TOP RIGHT: ENFOQUE/SIPA

Clockwise from top: Chesney decides he doesn't like his yacht anymore, so he ditches; posing with his pals … honestly, we think he's gonna be OK; "Chesney's Angels" take the plunge; the magical question, in rug form.

Although his arrival coincided with the crest of the '90s country crossover boom, it wasn't until his fifth album, 1999's two-million-selling *Everywhere We Go*, that his career hit its stride. A big hit from that album: "You Had Me From Hello," inspired by Zellweger's teary scene in *Jerry Maguire*. Don't count on hearing that one when his tour starts next spring.

Even as Chesney has amassed a legion of party-hearty fans rivaling Jimmy Buffett's Parrotheads in terms of both zeal and tequila intake, he has also furrowed eyebrows in the Nashville establishment, which doesn't exactly know what to do with an artist who sings about Caribbean hideaways from a massive state-of-the-art stage that would make U2 blush.

Chesney doesn't regret his status as a stadium slickster, but he doesn't agree with it either. "There is an imaginary line and people have given me grief for crossing it, but what does that mean? Does country mean unamplified instruments on the Opry? I've had so many people ask me what I'm doing writing all these beach songs. Well, why *not*?"

Chesney steps inside and starts fiddling with the TV remote. For no discernible reason, ESPN is replaying Uncle Kracker's performance of "Drift Away" from July's baseball all-star game. Chesney's eyes light up and he yells out to his friends: "Kracker's on!"

It's hard to imagine anyone outside of the immediate Kracker family getting this excited, but the portly Detroit rapper-producer is one of a handful of artists Chesney considers a friend and a contemporary—they dueted on the title track to 2003's *When the Sun Goes Down*. Ben's wife, Emily, elbows her husband when the camera cuts to the band. "Look, honey!" she says, pointing to the screen. "That's the one who always hits on me!"

Kracker's more famous Detroit colleague, Kid Rock, is another Chesney pal, as well as a frequent guest in St. John. *Blender* asks whether Rock offered any words of wisdom from his experience as a tabloid mainstay while dating Pamela Anderson. "Not yet," Chesney replies. "But I'm sure we'll have plenty to talk about next time I see him."

EVEN THOUGH THERE'S enough beer and rum to stay at sea for a week without fear of sobering, someone suggests we hit a bar. *Blender*, now firmly ensconced in fifth gear, privately demurs, afraid this means the trip's over. Not so. Ben steers the boat toward Jost Van Dyk in the British Virgin Islands, all of 15 minutes away, and docks right outside Sidney's Peace & Love. This open-air bar, decorated with hun-

IN COUNTRY MUSIC, WHERE REGULAR-GUY CHARM IS AS IMPORTANT AS A GOOD HOOK, CHESNEY IS THE PEOPLE'S CHAMP, THROWING MARGARITAS BACK WITH TAILGATERS BEFORE HIS SHOWS.

Reconsidering the stage-diving idea.

RUSTY RUSSELL/GETTY IMAGES

[KENNY CHESNEY]

dreds of signed T-shirts draped from the rafters, doesn't have a bartender on duty. This is an "honor bar": pour whatever you want, drop in the jar whatever you think you owe. Red Stripes and Painkillers—a lethal rum-pineapple-coconut-nutmeg concoction that's like mother's milk in these parts—all around. And even though we just ate ... oops, turns out that was *five hours ago* ... Chesney orders up lobster dinners for his increasingly rubber-legged peeps, who could stand a little solid food.

The album Chesney released last January, *Be As You Are*, was a low-key, self-penned mash note to days like this, and didn't receive the full-on promo blitz that will accompany the louder, more crowd-pleasing *The Road and the Radio*. The first single, "Who You'd Be Today," is a ballad about a deceased loved one, engineered for maximum tearjerking, but two of the album's up-tempo tracks are more likely to raise eyebrows. The chorus to "Living in Fast Forward" concerns a "hillbilly rock star out of control," while "Beer in Mexico," one of two songs Chesney wrote, will be parsed for insight into current, less music-oriented events.

Blender is about to ask Chesney about the lyric "Settle down and get married or stay single and stay free/Which road I'll travel is still a mystery to me," but he sees the question coming. "That's ironic, isn't it?" He laughs, which means it's OK for us to laugh too. "I wrote that last October after Sammy Hagar's birthday in Cabo. Believe it or not, it's about another relationship altogether."

Hey, *we* believe you. But people are gonna ask. Now anxious to get back on the road and concentrate on performing rather than refuting tabloid speculation, does he feel he has something to prove to those who know him only from E! rather than CMT?

"Look, I'm not in tabloids for a living," Chesney says. "This is an opportunity to show people what I do. I mean, no one ever heard of me in England, and now I'm the Guy Who Married Bridget Jones."

As the sun starts to set, sixth gear has finally been achieved. Everyone climbs back on board for the trip back to St. John. Meanwhile, Chesney pictures himself here a year from now, when he'll be famous not for his soon-to-be ex-wife but for being one of the biggest stars in music—country or otherwise—and smiles.

"Yeah, maybe I do have a little something to prove." [BLENDER]

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"WE'RE DOING IT FOR THE KIDS!

UNLIKELY ROCK STARS COHEED AND CAMBRIA SING ABOUT

BY CLARK COLLIS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY TURE LILLEGRAVEN

"DUDE, I LIVE for this shit" declares noticeably swaggering Coheed and Cambria bassist Mic Todd, surveying the array of carnival games before him. "I'm unstoppable! You pick it and I'll win it."

That is good news. A lot is riding on Todd's game-playing abilities this late afternoon at California's Santa Monica Pier. Offered the chance to spend $848 of *Blender*'s cash, the prog-rock wizards, who hail from upstate New York, have decided to try to win as many stuffed animals as possible at the pier's assorted games for the benefit of young Hurricane Katrina victims. It is a worthy, philanthropic plan but one which, it seems, relies heavily on Todd's living up to his self-described status as "the Tiger Woods of fairgrounds."

"Me—I'm terrible at this kind of stuff," says 25-year-old Coheed drummer Josh Eppard, standing before a game that might reasonably be called Knock Over the Evil-Looking Clown-Faced Objects With a Baseball. "Mic has got skills, though. Like, the grab-the-stuffed-animal-with-the-claw thing? I've seen him win it about 15 times. Personally, I think it's the alcoholism."

When *Blender* inquires of Todd whether he does, indeed, have to be "in the drunk zone" to succeed, the bassist replies, "Well, we'll find out—because I'm in it!"

Todd, 25, who acts as the band's laid-back Dean Martin to the manic Eppard's Jerry Lewis, is joking (we think). But regardless, he proves a demon at the game, swiftly winning a Curious George. Eppard, meanwhile, seems in less danger of securing a toy than accidentally cracking open the skull of *Blender*'s photographer, although he does eventually collect a Mario Bros.' Luigi. Meanwhile, frontman Claudio Sanchez's throwing abilities are rewarded with a Betty Boop, leaving only guitarist Travis Stever, who proves rather less than Nolan Ryan-esque in his pitching skills, leaving the game empty-handed.

"I put my poor form down to ... uh ... fucking sucking," explains Stever, 26.

His mood, if not necessarily his aim, improves as the band compete against each other at a game called Spyro-Mania, in which—and we're sure Sigmund Freud would have something to say on the subject—they fire a water pistol at a moving hole. By now it's clear they are far removed from the dour "muso"

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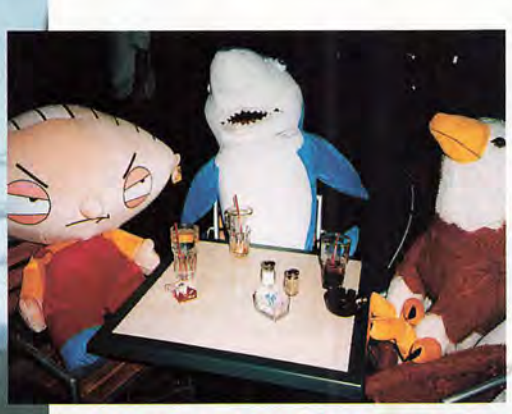
From left: Stewie, Mic Todd, big green turtle, Josh Eppard, Snoopy, Claudio Sanchez, giant eagle, Travis Stever, Jabberjaw.

GALACTIC EMPIRES AND ALTERNATE UNIVERSES, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO HELPING OUT THE VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA, THEY'RE ALL ABOUT THE CUDDLY TOYS



Left: Santa Monica's least intimidating biker gang. Above: Santa Monica's least intellectually stimulating tea party.

characters *Blender* was half-expecting, given the dense, complicated nature of their music, as typified by the quartet's new CD, *Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV: Volume 1*, the third part of a multi-album song cycle. Hinged around the tragic and violent adventures of a married couple—the band-name-inspiring Coheed and Cambria—this epic tale also concerns faraway planets, alternate universes, psychotic monsters and child murders. In short, it sounds like the work of people happier furrowing their brows over a game of Dungeons & Dragons than happily competing to win plushies.

"That is a big misconception about us," says Sanchez, 27, after Todd has defeated the rest of the band, twice, winning a Scooby-Doo and a Homer Simpson in the process. "We're not into D&D. You know, I think I played it once—when I was 9—and I just didn't get it!"

Undoubtedly, a good deal of the reason for the band's growing popularity—their previous album, 2003's *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3*, has sold half a million copies—rests with their catchy, almost emo-ish hooks rather than the tale being gradually revealed on their albums.

"If you don't want to get into the story portion of the whole thing, you don't have to," concedes Sanchez, who is responsible for the band's lyrical mythology and also pens a series of accompanying comic books. "You can just enjoy us as a normal rock band."

Well, not *that* normal ...

"We really wanted to bring a bigger rock show," Sanchez says of their fall tour. "So we've got some animation, a big elaborate light show and an 18-foot guillotine that sprouts wings."

But of course! Actually, wings would be pretty useful at the moment, given that the next game chosen by the band—the Pier Plank Plunge—challenges them to clamber across a suspended rope ladder in order to win a prize. Alas, it will prove to be their Waterloo. One by one, the band cockily approach this latest carny quest—and one by one they fall on their asses, losing not just the opportunity for further charitable booty but also a good deal of dignity as well. Even when Todd—the "Tiger Woods of fairgrounds," you may recall—cheats by starting almost at the end of the ladder, he is unable to press the necessary button before falling off. This game, it is agreed, is impossible. That agreement is shattered when the game's operator, who has repeatedly informed *Blender* that the quartet are "Doing it all wrong," scampers across, relieving the band of their last shred of self-respect.

With the realization that perhaps this whole game-playing thing may not be the most cost-effective of charitable endeavors, the band decide instead to buy all the toys they can carry—including a giant Jabberjaw and a similarly impressive representation of Stewie from *Family Guy*—while also resolving to make a donation of $250.

Next, the band opt to grab something to eat at one of the pier's restaurants, but on the way become distracted by a bicycle-for-rent shop. To the mild horror of their publicist, they rent a low-rider each and tear off across the beach into the growing gloom, the warning "No broken bones before the tour starts!" ringing in their ears. Despite repeatedly crashing into each other, they eventually return unscathed to ruminate on the day over drinks and burgers.

"I PUT MY POOR FORM DOWN TO ... UH ... SUCKING."

"We played in New Orleans when we were just starting," Claudio tells us. "It was really great. Obviously, it's a city with a lot of musical history. We were actually supposed to be going there on this next tour but ... that doesn't look like it's going to happen. It's really a terrible tragedy."

"But we won some stuff!" says Todd. "That felt good—doing it for the kids. Although I might have to take the Curious George home for my wife ..."

Todd looks up from his glass of water to be met with a ring of hard faces.

"Hey, I'm joking! I'm joking!" [BLENDER]

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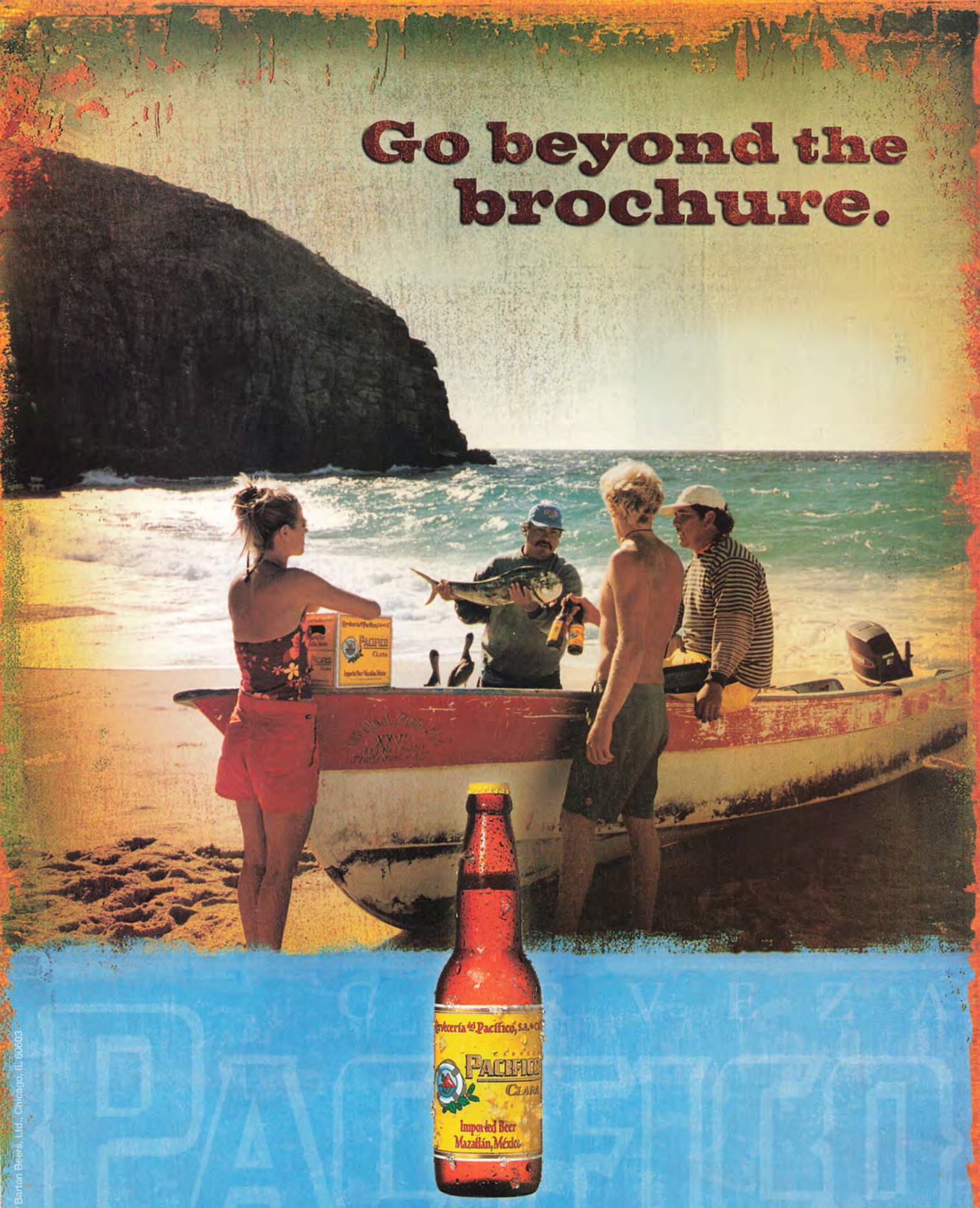

Mexico via Pacifico

Please drink responsibly.

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{ My Happy Ending }

BY RJ SMITH // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERYL NEILDS

SHE STARTED OUT AS A FRAGILE TEEN DIVA CAVORTING THROUGH VIDEOS IN HER UNDERWEAR AND MELTING DOWN ONSTAGE. NOW—AFTER SUFFERING THROUGH YEARS OF DRAMA TO RELEASE HER DAZZLING NEW CD—IS THE HIGH-PROFILE SELF-DESTRUCTION FINALLY BEHIND FIONA APPLE?

Fiona relaxes in her giant macrame bra.

DRESS BY **JENNIFER NICHOLSON** BUSTIER BY **FREDERICK'S OF HOLLYWOOD** BALLET TIGHTS BY **CAPEZIO** BOOTS BY **STELLA MCCARTNEY**

STYLING: MAUDE FOR THEREXAGENCY.COM; HAIR: CEMAL FOR STUDIO-13; MAKEUP: DARLENE JACOBS FOR PARTOS

EIGHT OR SO YEARS AGO YOU WERE REGULARLY FREAKING OUT—NOW YOU SEEM A LOT MORE RELAXED. WHAT'S CHANGED?
I'm in a really good place right now. I feel a lot more prepared emotionally to deal with public life than I have before. I've always had a bit of a hermit in me—more than a bit. When I was 16, I wouldn't want to go outside, wouldn't want anybody to see me. I'd actually cover my face everywhere. And now I feel a lot more at ease with people seeing me out and about. [*laughs*]

IT WAS SIX YEARS BETWEEN YOUR SECOND CD, *WHEN THE PAWN ...*, AND YOUR NEW ONE, *EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE*. WHAT WERE YOU DOING ALL THAT TIME?
Um, I really didn't do anything. I know I obviously had to have been doing a lot—because I'm a lot different now than I was then, but there's nothing that I can show you that I've done. I've tried to scrape my mind and rake up any little things that I might have done: I read some plays for a while; I spent a lot of time walking. That's something that still happens. I just walk around ... but the truth is that I really haven't done anything of consequence.

WERE YOU WRITING A LOT OF SONGS?
No. [*laughs*]

AND YOUR BASEMENT ISN'T FULL OF MODEL BOATS MADE OUT OF POPSICLE STICKS?
No. No.

WHAT WAS WITH THE PLAY-READING?
I got a house in Venice, California, in 2001 and when I moved in, it took me a long time to get furniture. I didn't even get TV until a year ago. I'd always wanted to read more plays, and I felt like, "Oh, that'll be my thing now. I'll read all the plays that everyone knows." I went to the bookstore and bought 20 plays, and I would just really get into them. I had a great time reading them. Unfortunately, I look at them now on my bookshelf, and ask myself what they're about, and I can't remember.

SO DO YOU STILL LIVE IN AN EMPTY HOUSE WITH A BOOKSHELF FULL OF DRAMA?
I have a dog. She was a stray—a pitbull mix. My house is one story, with a wall of oleander around it, so I don't have any curtains because I don't need them to get privacy. My best friend Bella lives in my guesthouse. I met her when I was recording the first album. She used to work at this restaurant where I'd get my dinner every night after recording. She would answer the phone and take my order—we talked to each other every day and became really good friends. And she moved into my guesthouse [*laughs*] like a year ago.

YOU STILL CAN'T DRIVE A CAR, CAN YOU? THAT'S A PRETTY ASTOUNDING ACHIEVEMENT FOR SOMEONE WHO LIVES IN CALIFORNIA ...
It doesn't fit my life. I'm just not a driver. I can't see myself ever driving. And I don't leave Venice that often—it's not like I'm going to clubs every night and the cabs add up or anything. So it's easy. And I know that some people say, "Oh, a car will give you a sense of freedom," but I feel freedom when I'm walking.

WERE YOU PISSED THAT THE EARLY VERSION OF *EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE* YOU MADE WITH JON BRION WAS LEAKED ONTO THE INTERNET?
There is a part of me that's like, "Fuck you. You didn't get my permission." It wouldn't bug me if it had been finished. But it wasn't done, and that's an invasion of privacy—of the work in progress. But I really believe that whoever did it thought they were doing me a favor, so I can't really be that angry about it. And at least it gives some attention to those recordings with Jon, even though they're not mixed right. If it weren't for that, maybe it wouldn't have gotten any attention at all. I mean I'm hoping at some point that Jon and I will be able to go in and mix that stuff properly and release it. Because even though I didn't end up releasing those mixes, I really am proud of them.

"I WAS DONE. I WAS WATCHING TV. I WAS GOING TO DO VOLUNTEER WORK."

WHAT WAS THE LOWEST POINT YOU REACHED DURING THE APPLEGATE MELTDOWN WITH YOUR RECORD LABEL?
I didn't keep up with anything. I didn't know anything about Free Fiona [the fan-based campaign to have the leaked version of *Extraordinary Machine* formally released], what was going on with Sony—I didn't care. I was done. I was watching TV. I was going to do volunteer work. I thought, there's no way I'm going to get off my ass, to get another career going, until I absolutely have to, until the money runs out. So I did nothing. After a few months of that I was in New York at my mom's house, and my manager called me up and said Free Fiona was going to be staging a protest outside the Sony building. And I thought it was really funny at first because I was literally standing there in my bathrobe, stained T-shirt, slippers—phone in one hand, TV remote in the other. And then I got off the phone and started crying.

WHY DID YOU CRY?
Because it really moved me. The thing that used to make me such a sad kid, that would run through my mind all the time, was that I wanted a family of friends. And I thought I was never going to have that because there's never going to be people sitting around a room having fun, when somebody stands up and goes, "Hey, we should call up Fiona, because it would be more fun if Fiona was here!" And these people sort of did that ...

ARE YOU WORRIED THAT PEOPLE ARE GOING TO THINK THIS IS A BREAKUP ALBUM ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH *MAGNOLIA* DIRECTOR PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON?
It's funny, because we stopped being together like five years ago. I stay on good terms with all my exes—I had a conversation with Paul just the other day. I felt like I had to call him up and say that although people are saying this is a breakup record, it's not true. Though, look, it would be ridiculous to say that he's not in these songs. I'm just not gonna say which ones.

ONE LAST QUESTION: WHAT'S BETTER ABOUT BEING 28 THAN 18?
Everything. Just ... everything. [BLENDER]

Fiona in the comfortable—and familiar—fetal position.

DRESS BY **RACHEL PALLY** TIGHTS BY **HUE**

And on the seventh day, Jesus *shredded*: the stage of Mars Hill church, Seattle.

THE EMO-DRIVEN LIFE

There's another rock revolution brewing in Seattle, Washington—and this time not in the coffeehouses or garages. Instead, you can find it—on Sundays only—at Mars Hill, a MEGACHURCH where tattooed hipsters come by the thousands to hear the word of God—set to an indie-rock beat. BY ANN POWERS PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL EDWARDS

A THOUSAND PEOPLE are on their feet for Team Strike Force tonight. The band, in Converse and corduroy, smash out the power chords of an emo anthem. "Give me a heart, a heart that is full," moans Luke Abrams, his dirty blond bangs flopping over his brow, his slight frame bent rapturously back. Matt Johnson smacks down the drums, sweat dampening his Dischord Records T-shirt. The room shakes with the crowd's singing. Hands raise invisible lighters aloft.

This moment should be followed by cold beers in the dressing room as Dave Grohl drops by to say hello, a couple of skater babes in tow. But in the green room at this particular venue, none of that awaits. There is a deli tray with olives and turkey sandwiches, but the only alcohol is a chalice of sacramental wine resting next to a worn Bible on a side table. Wives arrive, holding squirming tots. And the only guy in the room even slightly resembling a celebrity is 35-year-old pastor Mark Driscoll, who strums on a cast-off acoustic guitar before heading out to greet his congregation.

Team Strike Force is actually not playing at a rock club at all, but at Mars Hill, a church in the former fishing enclave of Ballard, in North Central Seattle. With more than 4,000 weekly attendants, this former basement Bible study group founded in 1996 by talk-radio host and Cure fan Driscoll is a megachurch—part of America's trend toward huge congregations that are reinventing the modern church, mixing contemporary technologies and design (arena-sized video screens, shopping-mall architecture) while maintaining a strict Biblical theology. Typically found in the exurb sprawl of the Sun Belt, megachurch Christianity, with its entrepreneurial spirit and squeaky-clean self-help style, strikes nonbelievers as the Blob that's eating free-thinking America. But churches like Mars Hill are changing that image by going—of all things—punk rock.

> The idea of rock & roll as the devil's music is as passé as Bono's mullet.

Mars Hill's congregation is full of moped-riding trendsetters embracing the seeming contradictions of a lifestyle that's both rock & roll and *7th Heaven*. These indie born-agains are typical Seattle creative types, working New Economy jobs and spending their extra money on wireless toys and New Pornographers records. But they also say no to sex before marriage, reject even the mildest recreational drugs and, even though they're friendly to outsiders, really do believe non-Christians are on the road to Hell.

One of the 100 fastest-growing congregations in America, Mars Hill is part of the "emergent church," a mostly white, urban attempt to reconnect the megachurch with the outside world. Driscoll has helped "plant" nearly 200 similar churches worldwide through the pastoral training program Acts 29. He's one of a new breed of preachers that includes Houston's Chris Seay, author of *The Gospel According to Tony Soprano*, and Jay Bakker, the much-tattooed son of fallen televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. These new evangelical leaders mesh Jesus's message with their own particular version of sex, drugs and rock & roll: marital sex, microbrews and rock music that brings glory to the Lord. And now they're bringing the power of Christian punk rock into the one place they most want those kids to go: church itself.

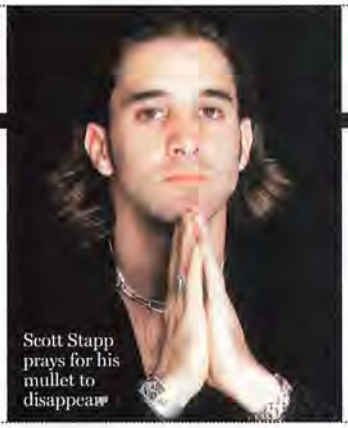
"Emerging churches acknowledge that life can be raw," says Andy Crouch, a columnist for *Christianity Today* who has written extensively on popular culture's intersection with the modern church. "Fundamentalism's attitude was, withdraw from culture. The megachurch mindset is that life is best when it's under control. The emerging church says that maybe real life is out of control. So their music can be more out of control, the preacher's language can be riskier. There is something rough around the edges, and they're not just tolerating it but celebrating it."

THE IDEA OF rock & roll as the devil's music is as passé as Bono's mullet. "Rock & roll is rooted most deeply, not in sex and drugs, but in anarchy," says Driscoll, a swarthy, blue-collar dude whose oratorical style is very Vince Vaughn in *Swingers*. "It's about personal freedom and rebellion against established rules. These days, the rock & roll lifestyle is becoming the majority. Everybody's drunk and high and getting laid. If you really want anarchy and rebellion, Christianity's the way to go."

From superstars U2 and Kanye West to up-and-comers like Switchfoot and Natasha Bedingfield—and through Jesus-loving intellectuals like Sufjan Stevens or Damien Jurado—young Christians have no problem these days finding their faith expressed in popular music.

"In the early '90s, we had all kinds of people against us," says Brandon Ebel, president of the Christian punk label Tooth & Nail, which broke P.O.D. and MxPx. "As we put out 400 releases in 12 years, they faded away."

STAPP: GEORGE DE SOTA/LFI; LEWIS: PICTORIAL PRESS



Scott Stapp prays for his mullet to disappear

GOD GAVE ROCK & ROLL TO YOU

HE ALSO GAVE YOU THE PLATYPUS. BUT THAT'S NOT RELEVANT TO THIS HISTORY OF ROCK AND CHRISTIANITY

CIRCA A.D. 30

JESUS CHRIST establishes rock & roll credentials by hanging out with a prostitute, Mary Magdalene, and turning water into wine at a party. Your move, Tommy Lee ...

12TH CENTURY

The Roman Catholic Church bans the diminished-fifth musical chord—or, as it is known, the "DEVIL'S INTERVAL"—later to be used by innumerable rockers.

1935

Birth of rock & roll pioneer JERRY LEE LEWIS, who will be expelled from Bible school for playing "boogie woogie" versions of hymns.

Team Strike Force, left to right: Matt Johnson, Rose Johnson, Luke Abrams, Jeff Bettger, Andy Myers.

But the very kids who've made Christian rock a phenomenon, the ones megachurches are counting on as the next generation, are bored to tears by the music typically heard in megachurches. Sold under the name "praise and worship," this adult-contemporary style fed the megachurch boom, overtaking old hymns and drawing in soft-rocking believers, but now it's as alienating to kids as a Celine Dion song. Emergent churches are to this status quo what the Class of 1977 was to classic rock—maybe not the Sex Pistols, but definitely the Clash. At Mars Hill, that means mixing cardigan hip with the vestiges of grunge, and praising Jesus to music that wouldn't sound out of place on college radio.

"If your music sucks, you're a bad Christian!" declares Driscoll. "God went to all this trouble to build our ears, and you're hacking out four chords of pop? That's probably a sin!"

Driscoll, a fervent music fan in his youth, adopted a strategy of supporting the local music scene from the beginning, providing practice space and even equipment for struggling bands, and running the Paradox all-ages club out of a theater used for services during the day. Young Christians were hungry for such an alternative. "If you want to be punk rock you can't go to a suburban megachurch with your parents," explains Driscoll. "Our church attracts the young, urban, hip, arty, cool, play-guitar-on-the-weekend, workin'-a-desk-job-during-the-week people. Some have grown up with church experience. But most haven't been for a couple of years. This is cool enough that they can relate."

"Many of us were going to churches where the music was cookie-cutter and dry," says Claudine Atencio, 31, who's been attending Mars Hill for three years. "Team Strike Force is something we can understand." Driscoll and his team of church elders have invested much thought and energy in making the physical environment of worship one where people like Claudine feel not only comfortable but impressed.

Everything in this vast former hardware store is sleek and modern, even the church motto: MEANING. BEAUTY. TRUTH. COMMUNITY. Aside from a distressed-metal cross that looks more like a design element than an icon and the shifting images on the "digital stained glass" video screens, this could be any room Fall Out Boy would play on a nationwide tour.

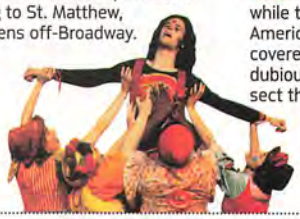
A Mars Hill service—there are four every Sunday—consists of about an hour and a half of Driscoll's preaching and 45 minutes of music. That's it, aside from voluntary communion and, of course, a collection. Many of the 40 musicians who lead worship also play in clubs with other groups, though these side projects often get jettisoned, partly because leading worship is a more fulfilling experience. None would admit that their music draws in followers—they give Pastor Mark and Jesus all the credit—but each band attracts particular congregants. The Parsons, led by worship pastor Tim Smith, work an atmospheric rock palette (think Coldplay); the Mars Hillbillies pump up old hymns alt-country style; and the Ball and Chain Gang, the church's closest thing to a praise and worship band, add a Britpop edge to their approachable repertoire.

Team Strike Force—the name is an obscure *Simpsons* reference—draw the youngest and most fashionable crowds. The band's downloads from the Mars Hill website numbered nearly 60,000 this year, ➔

TEAM STRIKE FORCE: MICHAEL EDWARDS; LENNON: BOB WHITAKER/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA LTD.; GODSPELL: BETTMAN/CORBIS; GREEN: PICTORIAL PRESS

1966
Following a public outcry and protests from religious groups, **JOHN LENNON** is forced to apologize for saying that the Beatles are "bigger than Jesus."

1971
The rock musical **GODSPELL**, based on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, opens off-Broadway.



1971
Fleetwood Mac guitarist **JEREMY SPENCER** disappears while the band are touring America. Eventually it is discovered that he has joined dubious Christian religious sect the Children of God.

1973
Soul legend **AL GREEN** undergoes a born-again experience while staying in Disneyland. Later, he stops recording secular music and buys the Full Gospel Tabernacle Church in Memphis.

1979
Newly born-again Christian **BOB DYLAN** puts out *Slow Train Coming*, the first in a series of heartfelt but increasingly god-awful religious records.

They sold their souls to rock & roll—and God: (left) Pastor Mark Driscoll and (right) the Parsons performing live.

though they've never played in an outside venue. A song like "I Bow Down," with its blood rush of power chords, belongs on the main stage at a Christian rock festival like Creation. The eight-year-old band's sound has the earnestness and daring of the best indie rock—you can hear both Fugazi and Queens of the Stone Age in their mix. And there's a little bit of majesty that comes from their conviction that the music they make goes straight to the Guy On High. Put Strike Force on the road, and they might be the next worship band to hit the mainstream, following the likes of Lifehouse and MercyMe. But they've committed to keeping their music in church, and their "not fans," as guitarist Andy Myers calls them, have no choice but to come hear the Word if they want to hear the music.

"We have this joke: You can choose to play to 25 people in a smoky club on a Monday night, or 1,000 people on Sunday," says Matt Johnson, 33, who put aside a promising career as a touring musician to focus on church. "Obviously that's not why we do it, but the hope is the songs will be more timeless. If I play in an indie-rock band, the songs will be around for maybe three months."

The members of Team Strike Force grew up on punk; most have given the secular rock lifestyle a shot. But something has led them to retrain their dreams on Jesus. They work day jobs—Luke Abrams, for example, is a Microsoft programmer with an MA in engineering from the University of Washington—and have mostly shelved their other musical efforts to focus on church. "We save all our rocket juice for worship," says Abrams, 28, whose math-rock side project, Supine to Sit (also featuring Matt Johnson), has recently gone on hiatus. "If I write a song, I would so much rather play it at Mars Hill than in a club."

"It might sound cheesy," says Myers, 28, who has played with nationally known artists like Jurado and Rosie Thomas. "But God put me in Mars Hill to play with these guys. Looking back, how I got here doesn't really make sense. What does make sense is that God put me here."

LATE ONE NIGHT after its weekly practice, Team Strike Force head over to the Sloop Tavern—a fisherman's bar near the Lake Washington Ship Canal where taci-

STRYPER: ROSS MARINO/RETNA LTD.; IDLE: *MONTY PYTHON* FILMS/THE KOBAL COLLECTION

1983

U2 release their breakthrough third album, *War*, whose track "40" is an adaptation of a New Testament psalm.

1985

Christian hair-metallers STRYPER—whose name stands for Salvation Through Redemption Yielding Peace, Encouragement and Righteousness—unleash debut album, *Soldiers Under Command*.

1989

Pope John Paul II calls for a ban on MADONNA's performing in Italy after the "Like a Prayer" video depicts her kissing a black saint.

1991

MONTY PYTHON's song "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," originally performed during *The Life of Brian*'s crucifixion sequence, hits No. 1 in the U.K. charts.

turn smokers play pool and the beer comes in quart-sized mugs. Sliding into a booth near the window and ordering a round, their chat turns to the latest Playstation games. Myers works for *Nintendo Power* magazine, and Abrams, the Microsoft wiz, is equally obsessed. These two fit the übernerd mold of the post-emo rock world; Abrams even gave his son the middle name "Vader." Bassist Jeff Bettger, 30, and drummer Matt Johnson, veterans of the Christian punk scene, represent old-school hardcore values. And then there's pianist Rose Johnson—Matt's wife, whose long blonde locks and creamy skin give her the look of a Disney pop star.

Lighting a cigarette, Rose, 23, explains the contradictions of the righteous indie-rock lifestyle. "What does Pastor Mark call it?" she asks. "Closed hand, open hand." She extends her palms to illustrate her point: to be receptive to non-Christian culture, but to keep Jesus and the Bible constantly in mind, as a kind of inner shield. So equipped, Strike Force's members have no problem doing things like opening for Goth extremist Michael Gira, as Bettger has several times, or joining a Dashboard Confessional tour, as Rose and Matt did in 2003, backing up singer-songwriter Rocky Votolato. Rose played bass on that tour, the instrument she first played at Mars Hill. She'd come with her parents when she was barely 14, a punk fan frustrated with her suburban megachurch. Her family returned to the suburbs; she stayed. "I showed up and they graciously let me try out for the worship team. On my bass case I had some stickers for these bands, Ninety Pound Wuss and Roadside Monument."

Those were Jeff and Matt's bands. "Somebody said, hey, did you know that those guys go to Mars Hill? And I was like, sweet! I'd like to meet them sometime. And I did meet them, and started playing with them. And then I married one of them!"

Matt's the only Strike Force member whose parents weren't churchgoing Christians, and when he tried to join a "fire and brimstone" church in high school, he felt like an outsider. His first 10 years of trying to keep the faith mostly frustrated him. He'd spent several years touring in Christian punk bands, but he was lost. "When I started going to Mars Hill, I was really kind of jaded," he says. "Christians were pissing me off, and I was struggling through some philosophy stuff, and there was nobody helping me through it. Mars Hill encourages that kind of rigorous theology, but then I had to figure out a way to live it.

"Against my inclination, I started playing drums in the worship department. The first couple times that I played in church, I felt really uncomfortable. I was used to hitting really hard, getting really sweaty, performing. It was really weird to have to play quieter, and I was very aware of people looking at what I was doing."

"We're not directing the attention to ourselves," adds Myers. "When people say, 'I really like Strike Force,' it's almost always followed by, 'It really helps me worship.' We get excited when we hear that."

"We're functional," adds Abrams. "We work correctly to pull people toward Christ."

There are limits on the freedom God grants, however. Even at Mars Hill, worship music has to be singable, it has to adhere to the Bible and it can't completely scare people off. Some worship bands get really boring because of these restrictions, but they've led Strike Force to develop its intriguing sound—tough like punk, heartfelt like emo, but with a bit of, say, Sarah McLachlan thrown in. Songs like the hard-hitting "Destructor" or the tender "Spherical" would sound great on college radio, and if the lyrics gravitate around sentiments like, "Christ before me, covers me with blood"—well, if Nick Cave can do it, why not them?

Yet Mars Hill's growth has affected Strike Force's musical balance. The new congregants aren't all bohemians, and the band has had to simplify songs, stop doing instrumentals, make everything more—well, a little more like praise and worship music. "There are songs that we don't play anymore, songs that we love, that were more creative and interesting than what we do now—but people didn't worship to it," admits Abrams. Strike Force is going ➔

Team Strike Force have the earnestness and daring of the best indie rock.

O'CONNOR 1992: YVONNE HEMSEY/GETTY IMAGES; POPE: MIMMO CHIANURA/AGF/REX USA; MASE: RAHAV SEGEV/RETNA LTD.; O'CONNOR 1999: FARRELL/PHOTOCALL/SIPA

1992
During a performance of Bob Marley's "War" on *Saturday Night Live*, **SINEAD O'CONNOR** rips up a photograph of Pope John Paul II, declaring, "Fight the real enemy."

1996
Future pontiff Cardinal **JOSEPH RATZINGER** tells a congregation gathered for mass at the Vatican that AC/DC are "an instrument of the devil." He also condemns those well-known Satanists, the Eagles.

1997
Christian rockers **CREED** release debut album *My Own Prison*. It sells five million copies—paving the way for the success of similar spiritually based bands P.O.D. and Evanescence.

1999
Rapper and Puff Daddy protégé **MASE** undergoes a religious conversion while entertaining "a dark-skinned young lady with a banging body" at Trump Tower. He later becomes a pastor.

1999
SINEAD O'CONNOR is ordained a priestess by Catholic splinter group the Latin Tridentine Church and takes a vow of celibacy, which "lasts about three months."

mainstream, not entirely by choice. But unlike the Killers, they're doing it for the deli tray.

When asked about the fact that Mars Hill musicians are unpaid—and in fact make their songs free for anyone to use via the web—Johnson gets a little huffy.

"In America, we've professionalized this music industry thing, this role of the legitimate artist," says Johnson. "As much as I'd like to get a wage from playing music, I don't need that for it to still be special. My friends ask me sometimes, 'So what are you doing these days? My band broke up.' That's too bad. But I'm playing. God gave me a talent to play music and I want to share that."

But wouldn't they at least like to get paid for their services at Mars Hill?

"I know a guy who is a brilliant computer programmer," Myers replies. "And he scrubs the toilets at Mars Hill. I don't see his job being any different than mine. When it comes down to it, we're serving the body. Christ is the head, and we're all part of the body."

"I'm the toenail," declares Bettger.

There are limits: Punk worship music must be singable—and adhere to the Bible.

JEFF BETTGER IS the Strike Force member most likely to take the piss out of piety. He can preach fire and brimstone with the best of them, aided by his devotion to dark prophets like Nick Cave and Dead Can Dance. But in many ways Bettger is the most unlikely member of the Mars Hill worship team.

"Jeff was always dynamic and controversial," says Brandon Ebel, who signed Bettger's old band Ninety Pound Wuss to Tooth and Nail. "He always did extreme stuff. He had the most crazy live shows. In the church community, he would freak people out."

"When I was on tour in Ninety Pound Wuss, we got kicked off stage in churches," Bettger affirms. "That's one reason we decided not to play them anymore. We've been prayed over, and run out of town."

Bettger moved to Seattle in 1996, when the city's all-ages scene was limited by arcane laws like the Teen Dance Ordinance. He started booking shows in fly-by-night spaces. Following his roommate Matt to Mars Hill, then located in an old movie theater in the University District, he became the chief booker for the Paradox, Mars Hill's all-ages venue.

Bettger spent those years living the classic punk-rock lifestyle and gaining a rep as one of Seattle's weirder scene habitués. Fans of his bands might have been surprised to see him leading worship, but that's what he was doing with his Sunday nights, at Goth-tinged services with plenty of candles.

He turned out to be a talented club booker, bringing cult favorites like Unwound, Cursive and Low through the Paradox. Bright Eyes played its first three Seattle shows there. Death Cab for Cutie passed through too.

Were people ever freaked out that the Paradox was also a church? "Oh yeah," Bettger says. "But I've never fit in to the music community. I'm either too Christian or not Christian enough."

Talking to the gentlemanly Bettger, it's easy to believe that any flak he has received is a matter of nonbeliever bigotry. But he does stand in judgment of others. "We have a close friend, a gay man who lived in our house for two years," he says when asked about the church's attitude toward the people Driscoll calls "sinners acting out their fallen nature." "He couldn't have guys over to our house. But we have also had single heterosexual roommates, and they couldn't have girls over. You can't get drunk in our house, though you can drink; this is our house, and it's our temple. It's not because I don't love you, it's because I do love you. And if I hold to these values, I need to put these standards on the house."

As Bettger sees it, every life has its restrictions. His are dictated by a greater power, and that makes them not just acceptable but welcome. He knows from sleeping on too many couches in his punk youth that the rock lifestyle requires many

Hell's ... uh, Heaven's Angels: Mars Hill worshipers.

TOP: MICHAEL EDWARDS; REV. RUN: ERIK C. PENDZICH (RUS)/REX USA; NEWSWEEK: (C)2001 NEWSWEEK INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED; JAY-Z: CARMEN VALDES/WIREIMAGE.COM; SOUTH PARK: COMEDY CENTRAL

1999
PUFF DADDY is pictured being crucified in the video for the Nas track "Hate Me Now." Puffy later decides this is a bad idea and allegedly beats the record company executive responsible for its release with a phone.

1999
Run-D.M.C. member and ordained minister **JOSEPH "REVEREND RUN" SIMMONS** conducts the wedding ceremony of fellow hip-hoppers Pepa, from Salt-n-Pepa, and Naughty by Nature's Treach.

2001
"Jesus Rocks!" declares the July 16 issue of **NEWSWEEK**, presenting a detailed look at the growing phenomenon of faith-based popular entertainment, including Christian rock.

2001
JAY-Z releases *The Blueprint*, in the course of which he claims to be "God MC/Me/J-Hova."

2003
In an episode of **SOUTH PARK** titled "Christian Rock Hard," Cartman has the gang forming a religious band because then "all the Christians will buy our crap. It worked for Creed!"

Our father, who art in Seattle: (left) a Mars Hill congregant and (right) worshipers at Sunday service.

TOP: MICHAEL EDWARDS; POPE: COURTESY VATICAN VIA GETTY IMAGES; WEST: GARY HERSHORN/NEWSCOM

sacrifices; so does evangelical Christianity. But Christ's sacrifices have a clear payoff for believers—reward in heaven, and the support of your community on earth. Rock's rewards remain an open question. Is the momentary pleasure of creativity enough? What happens when your ambition fades, or when it becomes clear you'll never fulfill it? Sure, playing music can feel like self-transformation, but for Bettger, church provides that momentary catharsis and a plan for the next day too.

It's hard for a nonbeliever to accept that a lifelong punk like Bettger can be satisfied feeding his muse only on Sunday. But Bettger, who no longer books the Paradox or plays in outside bands, insists it's true. Maybe his ego is tired after so many years of being in conflict. Maybe he wants something that feels real to him.

"Indie rock's a code of being cool, doing the latest thing," he says. "Christianity has absolutely nothing to do with that. It has to do with Jesus first, and then grace, love, acceptance, forgiveness."

Offering their music to God, Team Strike Force surrender things no right-minded musician should—income, creative control, the chance for larger recognition. But they don't care. "It's just like David in the Psalms," says Abrams, describing what it feels like to lead worship. "He's dancing, and his robe comes open and he's naked, and he's unashamed. It's like, who cares? He's into the moment, into the thing."

BACK IN CHURCH on a cool autumn Sunday evening, Strike Force begin "Destructor." It's a dark, piano-driven ballad about what Bettger would call "the awesome power of my Lord." The assembly, not just Strike Force fans but lots of corporate citizens and their mom-jeans-wearing wives, raises its voice. Abrams leads them. Many raise a hand in benediction, eyes closed, swaying. Myers and Abrams do the same as the music takes them all in.

These moments of rapture could be numbered. There's already a plan to add four new worship bands when Mars Hill expands to a bigger building next year; a day may come when Strike Force, just like an indie band on a major label, will be dropped or have to change so much they'll decide to hang it up. But that, they'd say, would be the Lord's will. In the meantime, the voices of the faithful join with Abrams onstage: "God will have his glory," he sings, "one way or another." [BLENDER]

2004

An ailing **POPE JOHN PAUL II** has his spirits, if not necessarily his hipness quotient, lifted when a posse of Polish breakdancers perform for him at the Vatican.

2004

KANYE WEST releases "Jesus Walks," which becomes a huge, Grammy-winning hit. "God is the executive producer of my life," the rapper later explains.

2005

Students at **WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY** are invited to attend a four-part religious discussion on "The Gospel according to U2."

2005

A Christian group demands that **JESSICA SIMPSON** apologize for her "slutty" "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" video. She doesn't.

CLARK COLLIS

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142
SYSTEM OF A DOWN
On their second 2005 album, Serj & Co. serve up an Armenian folk-metal-opera meltdown!
★★★★

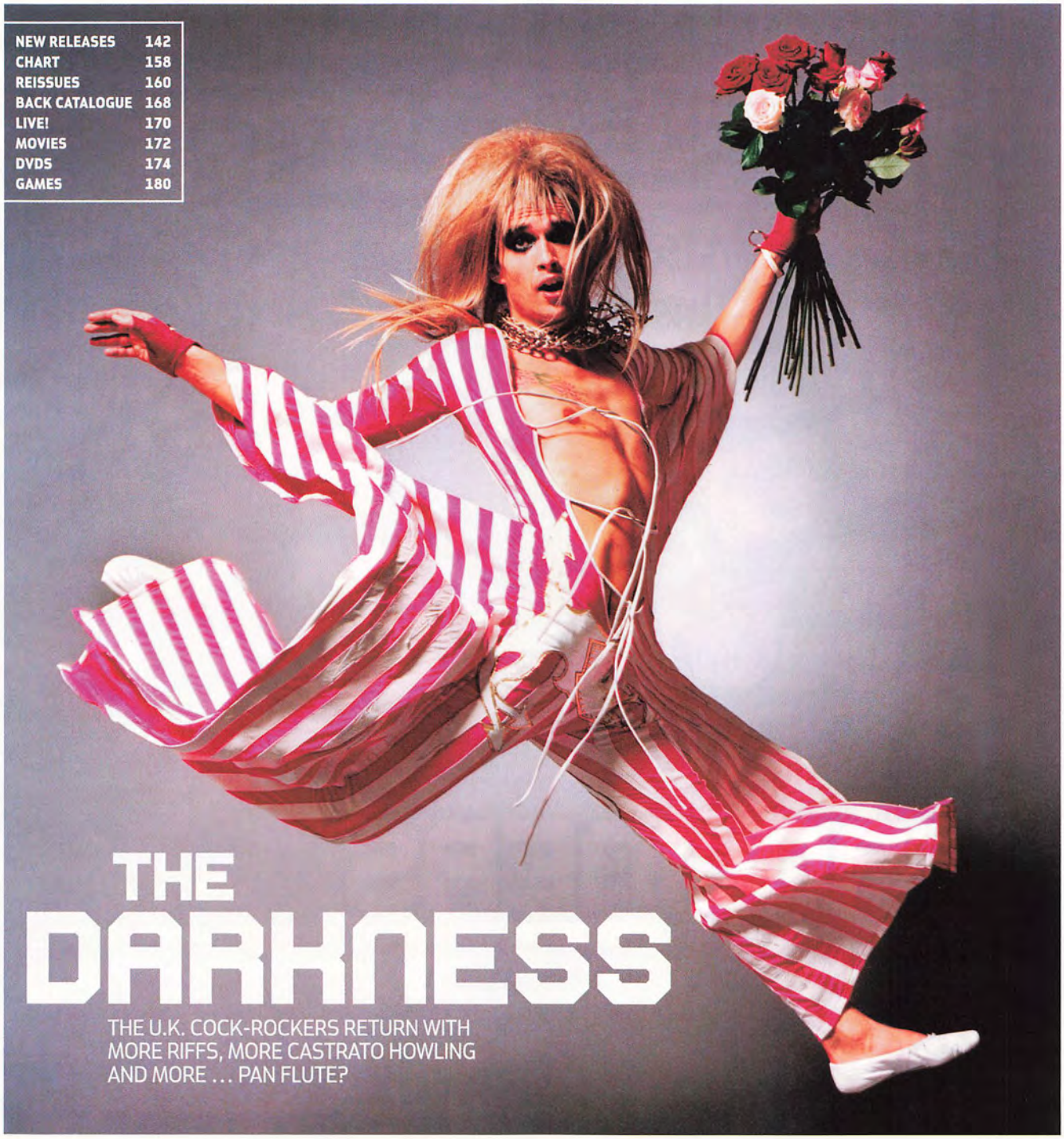
155
JUELZ SANTANA
New York's best new MC creates a universe where crack-dealing and '60s girl groups collide.
★★★★

163
BLINK-182
A hits collection shows how three SoCal nudniks changed the face of punk rock, one fart gag at a time.
★★★★★

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

NEW RELEASES	142
CHART	158
REISSUES	160
BACK CATALOGUE	168
LIVE!	170
MOVIES	172
DVDS	174
GAMES	180



THE DARKNESS

THE U.K. COCK-ROCKERS RETURN WITH MORE RIFFS, MORE CASTRATO HOWLING AND MORE … PAN FLUTE?

DARKNESS: DAVID LACHAPELLE/CONTOURPHOTOS.COM; SYSTEM OF A DOWN: DANNY CLINCH; SANTANA: CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE; BLINK-182: ESTAVAN ORIOL

System of a Down, left to right: John Dolmayan, Daron Malakian, Serj Tankian, Shavo Obadjian.

HEADLINERS

L.A. EXTREMISTS **SYSTEM OF A DOWN** MIX GOOFY JOKES WITH SCREAMS OF WAR

SYSTEM OF A DOWN

HYPNOTIZE ★★★★

AMERICAN/COLUMBIA

IT'S INEXPLICABLE THAT a band as obsessed with musical structure as System of a Down would release a 76-minute album in separate halves six months apart. So that's exactly what they did. The 36-minute *Mezmerize* came out in May, and now the 40-minute *Hypnotize* completes and redeems it.

Of course, System of a Down have never been about making linear sense. Listen to Serj Tankian's quavery, nasal sneer of a voice, and it seems he's a completely sardonic goofball. Yet when he shouts, "The bombs are falling overhead," it's clear that he's not joking at all. Meanwhile his songwriting partner, guitarist Daron Malakian, sings more prettily and earnestly, but often plays the nihilistic party boy: "Just a stupid motherfucker/If I die, I die."

In an era of monolithic, one-trick hard-rock acts, System of a Down are all over the place. Its four musicians can be a galloping thrash band, hard-rock anthem-builders, prog-rock tempo-shifters or an electrified Armenian folk ensemble. Verbally, Tankian and Malakian are at various moments politicos, cynical Los Angelenos, gross-out-loving Frank Zappa fans and Dada syllable slingers. With *Mezmerize* and now *Hypnotize*, System accelerate their shifts from pummel to tune to rant to majesty, so that three-minute songs can sound like epics.

This pair of albums is System's first big statement since *Toxicity*, released in September 2001. Post-9/11, the band still have the same themes in mind. The songs are angry at the exploitation of the poor by the rich, appalled by the toll of war on its combatants and victims, disgusted at media brainwashing and conspicuous consumption and—saving them from self-righteousness—tempted to indulge in all of them.

At the end of *Mezmerize*, System showed their lamest side with two songs whining about Hollywood. *Hypnotize* reclaims the pair of albums as a kaleidoscopic impression of life during wartime, overlaying the Armenian genocide of 1915 with thoughts of another desert war: Iraq. *Mezmerize* began with the intro to "Soldier Side," and *Hypnotize* ends with the complete song, declaring, "People all grow up to die." In between, there are bomb attacks, grieving mothers, memories of massacres, drug addicts, whores, fashion poseurs and scorn for "pathetic flag-waving ignorant geeks."

System gleefully exploit the basic thrash irony: As they denounce violence and suffering, they also provide testosterone jollies by blasting out choruses like "Attack attack attack!" The jumpy arrangements are also multipurpose: They let the band show off, play well to audiences with short attention spans and, most of all, speak to the fractured thoughts and emotional whipsaws of information-saturated 21st-century life.

Hypnotize has a little of everything: protest, pretension, comedy, brute force, delicacy, compassion, crassness, fury. Non sequiturs are built into songs like "Hypnotize" itself; it starts with Tankian asking, sarcastically, if the Chinese students who died protesting for democracy at Tiananmen Square were making a fashion statement but ends up with Malakian "sitting in my car and waiting for my girl."

As with *Mezmerize*, there are songs that should have been ditched, like the sappy power ballad "Lonely Day," but far more keepers, from the snidely hilarious "Kill Rock 'n' Roll" to the unstoppable, somber "Holy Mountains." And while System have all kinds of earnest points to make, they know when to trust their flying fingers. The album's most memorable song is the thrashy "Vicinity of Obscenity," in which Tankian shrieks a chorus about "banana terracotta terracotta pie." When music has that kind of momentum, the band knows, the smartest thing to do is to stop making sense.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: "Vicinity of Obscenity," "Holy Mountains," "Attack"

SOAD'S IPOD

THREE FREAKY ALBUMS DARON MALAKIAN LISTENED TO WHILE MAKING *HYPNOTIZE*

DARKTHRONE

TRANSILVANIAN HUNGER

FUTURIST, 1994

"They're an underground Norwegian black metal band. It's very raw—most of their albums sound like they were recorded on an eight-track in a night or two. It actually sounds like shit. But for anyone who's into thrash-metal, it's a classic."

KRAFTWERK

THE MAN-MACHINE

CAPITOL, 1978

"They basically inspired the last 30 years of music—pop, hip-hop, electronica, anything you listen to. Having a signature sound is not easy, but you can hear Kraftwerk and know right away that it's them. That's what we try to do."

BRIAN ENO

HERE COME THE WARM JETS

ISLAND, 1974

"One of my guitar techs made me a mix CD with a couple of Eno songs. Whether it's in Roxy Music or in his production work, he was doing things with sound in the early '70s people still aren't doing now."

JOSH EELLS

ROBERT SEBREE

Big & Rich couldn't get enough of their motel vibro-bed.

MAD HATTERS

SECOND CD BY NASHVILLE FREAKS COULDA BEEN FREAKIER

BIG & RICH

COMIN' TO YOUR CITY ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

ALONGSIDE THEIR PAL Gretchen Wilson, Big & Rich were the country music story of 2004: a sharp songsmith (John Rich) and hippie harmony partner (Big Kenny) making campy yet credible radio pop spiked with Southern rock and rap. Their debut, *Horse of a Different Color*, sold more than two and a half million copies, even though—with six-foot Russian-rapping Cowboy Troy and a dancing midget—the group was a freakshow by Nashville standards. That's precisely the shtick they sell on their second LP, opening with the knockoff "The Freak Parade." But their follow-up, truth be told, is not freaky enough.

The title track shouts out city names like the Dead's "Truckin'" and Ludacris's "Pimpin' All Over the World"—a time-honored marketing trick—and it's fun enough. But "Caught Up in the Moment" seems less a song than a video script (an airport pickup with some mile-high-club action, a Vegas wedding) and much of the rest, including the churchy "Leap of Faith" and Big Kenny's hooky heartbreak rocker "Slow Motion," is well-built boilerplate. Only "Filthy Rich" (a vaudeville ditty calling out shyster CEOs and TV preachers), the Sly & the Family Stoned "Jalapeño" and the boozy Tex-Mex "20 Margaritas" live up to *Horse*'s wildest rainbow-coalition jams.

But then there's the album closer, "8th of November." Movingly introduced by veteran Mason-Dixon line jumper Kris Kristofferson, it's a song about dying soldiers inspired by a band friend and set in Vietnam—safer territory than Iraq for pop songwriters (see the Dixie Chicks' "Travelin' Soldier," which got them banned on radio). It laments, rather than denounces, war, while praising the bravery of a guy "doing what he had to do." You can't imagine anyone unmoved by the story, and it shows what this goofy but high-minded band does best, which is to imagine—like country's best outlaws—a nation where freaks and good ol' boys, red-staters and blues, can find common ground. That Big & Rich fall short just shows how hard it is these days to please everybody.

WILL HERMES

DOWNLOAD: "8th of November," "Filthy Rich"

THE SCORE

✪✪✪✪✪	A CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

AEROSMITH

ROCKIN' THE JOINT ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Pop's dirty old men practically backflip through a charging live set

Despite a tawdry legacy of drugs and divorce, Aerosmith aren't only still kicking, they're still kicking ass. At this Las Vegas show, also captured on DVD, the band bother with only one of the lightweight singles from their comeback era—the '98 ballad "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing," passionately belted by 57-year-old longhair and sobriety advocate Stephen Tyler. Instead, they barrel through live standards and riff-rich album cuts, grinning through "Big Ten Inch Record," whipping up a clamorous blues in "Rattlesnake Shake" and strutting through a fluid, serpentine "Walk This Way." "Draw the Line," written in 1977 as Tyler flirted with drug-fueled oblivion, even sounds a little *too* spirited. You have to wonder how many wheatgrass shots he downed before the set.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Walk This Way," "Rattlesnake Shake"

TREY ANASTASIO

SHINE ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Phish guitarist stops feeling tricky, gets back to the classic-rock era

Longtime Phish fans are bound to hear Trey Anastasio's optimistic breakup songs as a farewell to the self-consciously clever jam band he led for 21 years. The lyrics here are his own (unlike in Phish songs) and elation trumps regrets as he sings, "Severed and free/Leave what you wanna leave/Escape into the air." He sets aside the funk, horns, orchestra and most of the musical gamesmanship that marked his previous solo albums for unabashedly 1960s-rooted guitar rock: breezing along like the Grateful Dead, twining multiple guitars like the Allman Brothers, emulating the architectural splendor of late Beatles. His voice is modest as ever, and, true to both Phish and the cosmic-hippie forebears he embraces, he never lingers over angst. But there's no jam-band noodling, and Anastasio's indelible head-bobbing cheer is now attached to the kind of straightforward hooks Phish preferred to twist.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: "Sleep Again," "Air Said to Me," "Shine"

I LOVE THIS CD!

KEIRA KNIGHTLEY
Actress, *Domino*, *Bend It Like Beckham*

JOSH RITTER
GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO
SIGNATURE

"Every song tells a story. The music's great, but I really love how you can hear all the words of his songs."

KENNY CHESNEY

THE ROAD AND THE RADIO ✪✪

BNA

Country music's 2004 Entertainer of the Year must be saving it for the stage, because he's a dour drag here

ON THE REBOUND

Kenny Chesney's conversational, Everyman voice is pleasant enough in his affable singles, but over the course of an album it's revealed as a tedious instrument, frequently lacking expression. That's sure true of his latest batch of self-mythologizing, on-the-road-ag'in thumpers and baby-you-redeemed-me ballads. The melodies are strikingly generic for a star act—country-rock and power-ballad tunes that exist as background atmosphere for his sonorous delivery. Among the worst: the romantic schlock of "You Save Me," the improbable, egregious "Freedom" (he and a "soldier" have a good cry over the title concept) and the remarkably condescending "Like Me," in which he prays for all the "wannabes" who want to be "living free like me." Sheesh, what happened to the jovial guy who used to sing "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy"?

KEN TUCKER

DOWNLOAD: "Living in Fast Forward"

CHOCOLATE GENIUS

BLACK YANKEE ROCK ✪✪✪

COMMOTION

Brooklyn trickster is sharp, even in relaxation mode

"I've got so many lives, you can call me Fluffy," purrs Marc Anthony Thompson on this meandering take-another-toke of an album, the third display of casual brilliance he's issued as Chocolate Genius. The mellow, jazz-jammy tracks here meditate tenderly on lost love and the costs of a wandering eye, but within Craig Street's lush production lurks Thompson's restless wit, sharp

BIG & RICH: KRISTIN BARLOWE; KNIGHTLEY: MICHAEL TOMPKINS/FILMMAGIC.COM

as cheddar and busy dismantling all musical and emotional categories. His coffee-stained croon invokes Randy Newman doing Satchmo, or Lenny Kravitz with a brain, or Moby if his glamour standard was jazz, not punk. The tea-loving baldhead appears here, along with a score of other Neuvo Yorkers and, somewhere in there, Beach Boys lyricist Van Dyke Parks. Endlessly listenable, like a pleasant dream with a haunting subtext, this record has claws.
ANN POWERS
DOWNLOAD: "Amazona," "It's Going Wrong"

CREAM

LIVE AT ROYAL ALBERT HALL ✪✪✪✪

REPRISE

Reunion of the Year for the 50-and-older set

On classic-rock radio, Cream is permanently enshrined for pop-friendly blues salvos like "White Room" and "Sunshine of Your Love." Onstage in the '60s, where the showboat jamming between guitarist Eric Clapton, bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker set a standard for rock virtuosity, they put the "super" into supergroup. But their success was accompanied by super egos, and Cream lasted only two years. Time heals wounds and sharpens skills as well, and this reunion set (culled from four May shows in London, 37 years after they broke up) improves on the originals. Once obsessed with instrumental one-upmanship, their jams now stress interplay and groove—always a plus with the blues, and a definite boon to "Crossroads." Apart from T-Bone Walker's 1947 hit "Stormy Monday," there's no new material, but no matter; the band has never sounded better.
J.D. CONSIDINE
DOWNLOAD: "Born Under a Bad Sign," "Crossroads," "Badge"

Trey Anastasio on Fox's *When Guitar Cases Attack!*

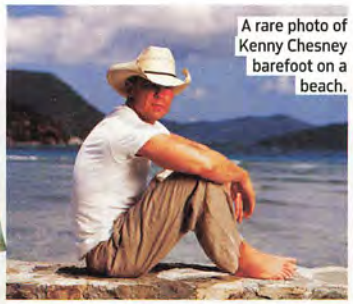
THE FALL

FALL HEADS ROLL ✪✪✪✪

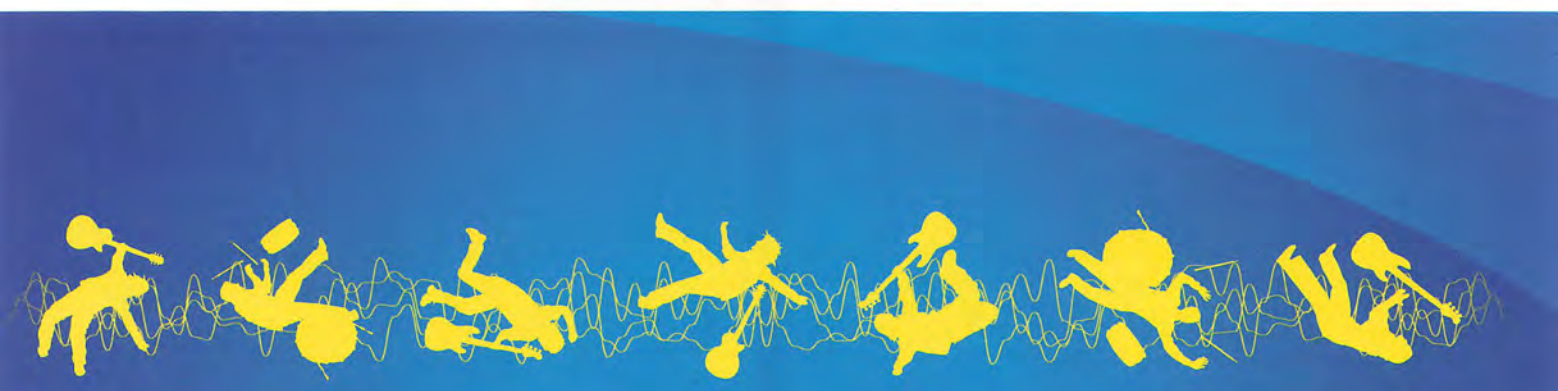
NARNACK

On their 5,698th album, enduring British punk smartasses rage eccentrically against mortality

Marble-mouthed Fall ranter Mark E. Smith routinely fires his band members (hence the title of their twenty-fifth studio album); fortunately, this is the first lineup in ages that's more than a pickup group for him. He sounds as if he's disintegrating—a lot of his furious, elliptical lyrical fragments this time are about displacement, mortality or disconnection from "modernity," and he's given up on singing in tune—but the arrangements pound and lurch through acrid garage-punk riffs with crazy sureness. The highlight is a speed-addled cover of the Move's psychedelic nugget "I Can Hear the Grass Grow." And the last head to roll here is Smith's own: The icy closer "Trust in Me" is mumbled by a crew of stand-ins, without him.
DOUGLAS WOLK
DOWNLOAD: "I Can Hear the Grass Grow," "Blindness," "Ride Away"


A rare photo of Kenny Chesney barefoot on a beach.

ANASTASIO: PHIL KNOTT; CHESNEY: MELANIE DUNEA



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Bun B: "Where the hell did I park my car?"

HOT BUN

TEXAS RAP VET SCHOOLS THE YOUNG 'UNS

BUN B

TRILL ✪✪✪✪

RAP-A-LOT

THE ONLY THING worse than being damned with faint praise? Being damned with regional fame. Half of the Texas rap originators UGK, Bun B has been one of the South's most intricate, vivid lyricists for over a decade. Despite a couple of mainstream peeks—notably Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'"—this most gentlemanly of Southern thugs has remained a local hero. His solo debut is more than a coming-out party; it's a tribute as well, with a younger generation gathered in respect.

While the guests—Mike Jones, Ying Yang Twins, T.I. and more—threaten to crowd Bun, he's versatile enough to rise above the frenzy, playing the corner boy on "Pushin'," the scorned veteran on "The Story" and the callous mack on "Who Need a 'B.'" The best songs, like Bun, bridge generations. Lil Jon pays homage to Houston's screw music—the lethargic anti-crunk—by slowing the speed and upping the terror on the standout "Trill Recognize Trill," a duet with Ludacris. And the remix of the pneumatic single "Draped Up"—featuring Lil' Flip, Paul Wall and half a dozen other Houston MCs—is the city's most exciting position statement since "Still Tippin'."

Nothing, though, tops "Get Throwed," a dub-rock variation on the Houston sound and the logical summation of Bun's career. There's a gloriously sneering verse from UGK partner Pimp C (incarcerated since 2002 on a probation violation) and brash ad libs from Young Jeezy, the Atlanta trap star whose style owes obvious debts to UGK. Finally, Jay-Z returns the "Big Pimpin'" favor with a devastatingly succinct verse.

Comfortably in the middle, Bun exudes calm, effortlessly hopping between different flow patterns. After a decade in wait, the camaraderie is nice, but he's playing to the spotlight, not the supporting cast.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD: "Get Throwed," "Trill Recognize Trill"

BUN B'S CURRENT LISTENING

YOUNG JEEZY
LET'S GET IT: THUG MOTIVATION 101
DEF JAM

ESG
FAMILY BUSINESS *GONZALES MUSIC*

INSTITUTE

DISTORT YOURSELF ✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Former Bush frontman emerges from wedded bliss with new band, loud guitars, bizarre love lyrics

In the decade since Bush went multiplatinum by polishing grunge's rougher edges into melodic guitar anthems, Gavin Rossdale quit, married Gwen Stefani and withdrew from the limelight. But he hasn't settled down completely: On his new quartet's debut (produced by Helmet's Page Hamilton and featuring several noise-rock graduates), Rossdale packs a fistful of power chords, clearly intent on making up for lost time. But Institute's aggression can't camouflage Rossdale's rusty songwriting: Lacking his once dependably hummable hooks, hard-rockers like "Mountains" cling lifelessly to grunge's soft-loud template. Matrimony inspires the best song here, "Ambulances," but it also pushes Rossdale to yelp that he's "deep-fried in the heat of your love." Hopefully that's not engraved on Gwen's wedding band.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD: "Ambulances"

THE ISLEY BROTHERS FEAT. RON ISLEY

BABY MAKIN' MUSIC ✪✪

DEF SOUL/DEF JAM

Stale promises and painful pickup lines, all on the subject of "it." Ick!

This forthrightly titled album features 64-year-old soul singer Ron Isley, not his über-macking alter ego, Mr. Biggs. What's the difference? The latter, a frequent R. Kelly sidekick, slick-talks ladies so he can bed 'em; the former slick-talks ladies so he can wife 'em. Lyrically, it amounts to the same: excruciatingly cheesy, gruesomely detailed pickup lines about being "inside of you/making up for the time/I didn't give it to you." Gliding effortlessly into falsetto, Isley's velvety voice has an alluring been-there-done-that quality, and for good reason: since the 1950s, various configurations of the six Isley Brothers have gone from gospel to Motown, hard funk to R&B. But since nearly every track is about being there, doing that and turning it all around for a good woman's love, that voice becomes tepid and tedious. Younger brother Ernie's power-ballad guitar heightens the tackiness of stale love songs with all the sincerity of, well, Mr. Biggs.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Gotta Be With You"

JIMMY EAT WORLD

STAY ON MY SIDE TONIGHT ✪✪✪

TINY EVIL/INTERSCOPE

Arizona's emo greats keep introspection, lose exuberance

Jim Adkins may have sung his heart out. Having recently helmed two discs of impeccably propulsive emo-pop, cornering MTV in 2002 with the I'm-OK-you're-OK "The Middle," the Jimmy Eat World frontman now sighs through an EP of somber, chiming regrets. (Sparta's Tony Hajjar provides backup.) Adkins and his band have always found heartache's sweet spot. Here they elevate exhaustion, transforming it into something like longing. The nearly eight-minute "Disintegration" models itself on the stark, circular musings of someone recently dumped, with a knotty, booming drum beat, persistent guitar murmurs and, in the big finish, layered, competing melodies. Conventional and pretty, the remaining tracks are more literal, and less arresting, laments. Their yearning is our yawning.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Disintegration," "Closer"

THE JIM YOSHII PILE-UP

PICKS US APART ✪✪✪

ABSOLUTELY KOSHER

California quintet's third album is a bittersweet symphony—OK, it's mostly just bitter

With so many sad-sack indie rockers going on and on about how much

Jimmy Eat World, trapped after mistakenly soundproofing the exit.

BUN B: JACK THOMPSON; JIMMY EAT WORLD: KEVIN SCANLON

they hate themselves, it's refreshing to hear from one who hates everybody else for a change. Paul Gonzenbach, leader of Oakland, California's Jim Yoshii Pile-Up, spent the better part of 2003 battling mental illness and severe depression. Then he wrote this album about it. Songs like "A Toast to the Happy Couple," a sarcastic suicide note to his mom and dad (allegedly inspired by actual diary entries), or "R.E.V.U.L.S.I.O.N.," whose title he shouts like the captain of the world's grouchiest pep squad, are full of loathing and regret. But the music refuses to share his anguish: It's all clear-eyed melodies and guitars as cool and crisp as an autumn evening. Misanthropy has rarely sounded so lovely.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "A Toast to the Happy Couple," "Silver Sparkler"

I LOVE THIS CD!

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
Actor, *Dazed and Confused, Two for the Money*

JAMES MCMURTY
LIVE IN AUGHT-THREE *COMPADRE*

"He has a bunch of great albums, but I like the live energy on this one. His songs tell great stories. This is great bar rock music."

MCCONAUGHEY: JON KOPALOFF/FILMMAGIC.COM; BRAKES: STEVE GULLICK

LADY SOVEREIGN

VERTICALLY CHALLENGED ✪✪✪✪

CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES

Jay-Z's favorite U.K. shorty wants fans to dance "like fucked-up karate"

For 30 years, MCs have told crowds to body-rock, shake dat azz, get crunk and so forth. On this EP of singles, remixes and new tracks, 19-year-old Louise Harman puts an oddly British spin on the tradition: "Lose your manners!" she exhorts. Sovereign knows that the key to success as an outsider (she's a five-foot-one white girl from suburban London) is to exult in being an outsider. She sports '80s-style Adidas track suits, but beyond that she follows her own delirious logic. In a snotty, luxurious chirp that's a hook unto itself, she slides through rambling internal monologues about whatever, from eyeballs popping out of their sockets to mattresses that smell like cat piss—all over jittery, alien but danceable electronics.

THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR

BRAKES

GIVE BLOOD ✪✪✪✪

ROUGH TRADE

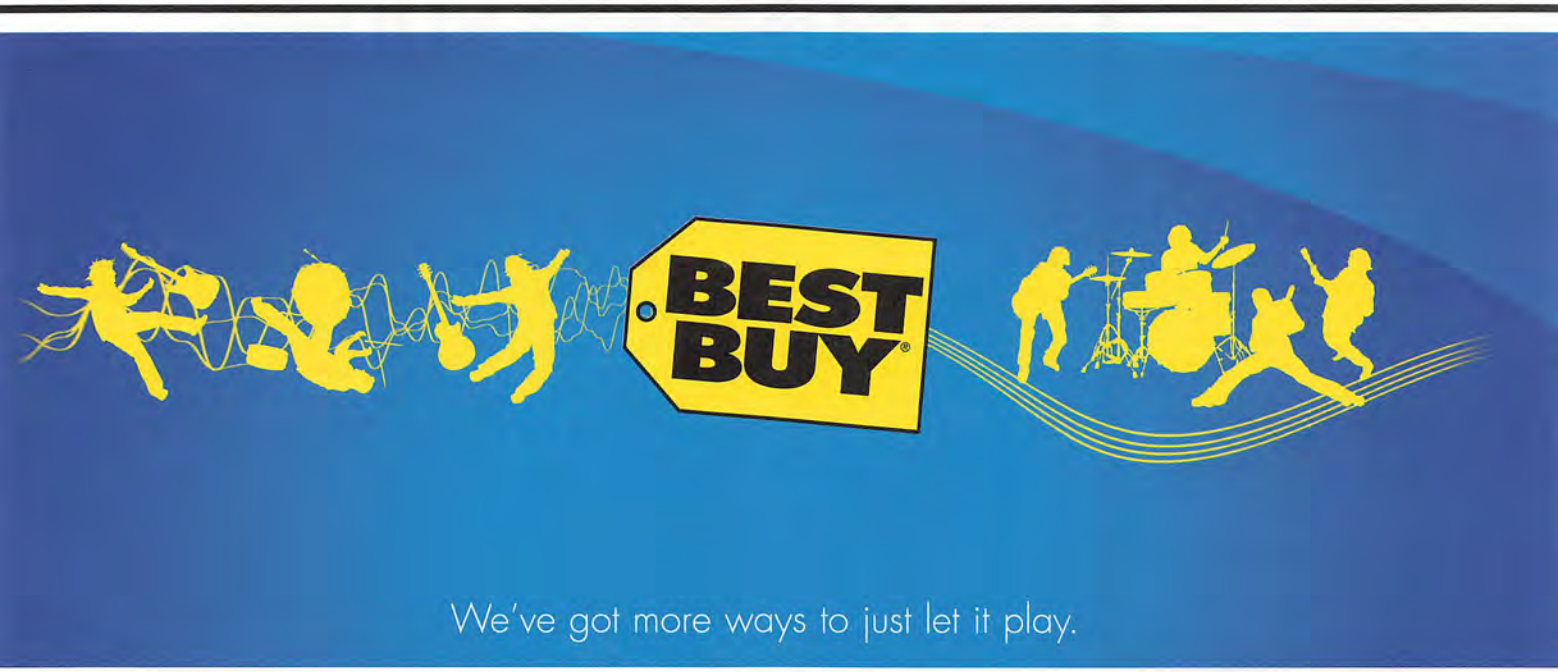
Boozed-up British punks love country twang, hate your trendy band

The sloppy, saucy Brighton quartet Brakes took five days to record their debut album. It sounds like four days and 23 1/2 hours were spent getting wasted, telling bad jokes and trashing equipment, with the remaining 30 minutes devoted to bashing out 16 tracks of stupid-brilliant punk rock in real time. Frontman Eamon Hamilton, freed from his day job in middling mope-pop band British Sea Power, stutters and yelps in a strangled falsetto, lashing out against name-dropping scenesters and spouting nonsense philosophy over twang-inflected speed rushes. Brakes' flirtation with country blossoms into full-blown romance on a blustery cover of Johnny Cash and June Carter's "Jackson," as well as on "NY Pie," in which Hamilton adopts a comic approximation of a Southern accent while narrating a tale of passing out in a New York City street. Good thing the record's so short; if it were any longer, we'd get a hangover.

AMY PHILLIPS

DOWNLOAD: "All Night Disco Party," "The Most Fun," "Heard About Your Band"

Brakes: Proud of their music, chins.



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TALES FROM THE STUDIO

DARKNESS SINGER **JUSTIN HAWKINS** TAKES US AROUND THE WORLD OF *ONE WAY TICKET TO HELL ... AND BACK*

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENED
"Rockfield Studios in Wales. It's very rural and idyllic—just cows, sheep and shit."

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, *ONE WAY TICKET*'S DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY
"Four, I suppose. There was panic happening all around us because of the money we were spending and the time it took, but those aren't our problems. We had quite a nice time."

CHEMICAL AIDS
"Between two and 10 bottles of champagne a day. And sometimes Alka-Seltzer first thing in the morning. That's really it."

RIGHT. BUT SERIOUSLY
"Seriously! There's no way you'd ever catch us infringing the laws of that sweet nation. I did get three points on my driver's license, but that was for going 20 miles over the speed limit."

ALL-STAR SESSION MUSICIAN
"The South American pan-pipe player who does the intro. I initially tried doing it myself on a synthesizer, but it sounded really cheesy, so we got this guy who's supposedly the best in the world. He lives up a mountain somewhere in Peru."

THE HATERS WILL SAY
"What they usually say, the fucking retards. 'You're still a joke band, you're still a novelty.' Fuck off."

THE MONEY SPENT RECORDING THIS ALBUM COULD BUY
"About five Lamborghini Diablos. That, or a two-bedroom house in a nice part of London."

WHY THEY DON'T REGRET IT
"I've already got a six-bedroom house in a nice part of London."

JOSH EELLS

"Shakira, eat your heart out."

The Darkness camp out for Billy Graham.

THE BOMBAST SQUAD

CHEEKY BRITROCK WIZARDS SET THEIR WANDS TO "BONKERS"

THE DARKNESS

ONE WAY TICKET TO HELL ... AND BACK ✪✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

IF ROCK & ROLL were a science class, the Darkness would be its stubborn creationists. The English quartet's entire outsized existence is a testament to the belief that musical evolution is overrated, Western civilization peaked in 1976 and arpeggiated guitar solos are the voice of God Himself. For them, the phrase "more cowbell" isn't just a studio direction; it's a life purpose.

The band sold 700,000 U.S. copies of their 2003 debut, *Permission to Land*, thanks to two things: the smash metal romp "I Believe in a Thing Called Love," and the shameless ridiculousness that allowed singer Justin Hawkins to parade around in spandex unitards. But *Permission* was a little too heavy in the wrong places, a roaring 747 that never soared quite as high as it should have. For their second album, they've hooked up with legendary Queen producer Roy Thomas Baker, who somehow makes them sound *more* outrageous—and more convincing.

They don't take long to go over the top: The album opens with a mystical pan-flute intro that would put Zamfir to shame. From there, we're on an epic, whirlwind journey that includes a march across misty mountains and a rave-up outside the Taj Mahal. Baker drenches the whole thing in Valhalla-shaking reverb and Freddie Mercury–esque four-part harmonies—an awesome monument to pre-ironic excess clocking in at a lean 35 minutes.

For all his cock-rock bravado, Hawkins is kind of a softie. "Dinner Lady Arms" tells the story of an old man who's still hot for his wife despite her having a figure like a retired cafeteria worker. Elsewhere he rhymes "eyes" with "thighs" so sweetly, you almost believe he's more interested in the former. And "Knockers" is choogling boogie-metal about ... well, that one's about a girl with big knockers. But its hook may be the ultimate sensitive guy come-on: "I love," Hawkins declaims in a heavenly falsetto, "what you've done with your hair."

Mostly, though, *Ticket* rumbles, it struts, it shreds, it wails. Guitarist Dan Hawkins's riff on "Bald" is a kick in the codpiece, and "Hazel Eyes" sounds exactly like a 14th-century English folk ballad would if you took away the lute and replaced it with a whole lot of cocaine. There's also bagpipes, electric sitar solos, a kick-ass string section and a *triangle*. How much more rock could it be?

The answer, as a wizened old sage once said, is none. None more rock.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "One Way Ticket," "Knockers," "Bald"

JUSTIN HAWKINS'S CURRENT LISTENING

THE UPPER CRUST
ONCE MORE INTO THE BREECHES
EMPEROR NORTON

TODD RUNDGREN
SOMETHING/ANYTHING? *BEARSVILLE/RHINO*

DARKNESS: SIMON SONGHURST; HAWKINS: AMIT LENNON/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA LTD.

The Mars Volta look to and 'fro.

What better way to make crowds go crazy than to make songs that sound like insane asylums?

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Random," "Fiddle With the Volume," "The Battle"

THE MARS VOLTA

SCABDATES ✪✪

GSL/UNIVERSAL

On indulgent live set, over-the-top prog-rockers become over and out

The Mars Volta splintered from punk marauders At the Drive-In to devote themselves to two excess-is-best concept albums, including this year's audaciously rewarding *Frances the Mute*. On this live disc, culled from two years of touring, they blow out their earlier, less-focused material. More than 12 minutes of instrumental noodling serves as window dressing for two multipart suites, "Take the Veil Cerpin Taxt" and "Cicatriz." Guitarist Omar Rodriguez-Lopez gets plenty of room to splatter over the Latin-fired crescendos. He offers more than a mere rehash of Santana's *Lotus*-era jazz-rock moves, but the songs get lost in waves of wah-wah long before a long, slow fade into random-noise oblivion. Without the mind-toasting visuals and singer Cedric Bixler-Zavala's hot-foot dancing, this is one of those you-had-to-be-there mementos.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD: "Concertina," "Take the Veil Cerpin Taxt"

THE MENDOZA LINE

FULL OF LIGHT AND FULL OF FIRE ✪✪✪✪

MISRA

Brainy Brooklyn band question their heritage, their President

What's the difference between getting thrown—out of a car, for example, as in a song here—and being pushed? The Mendoza Line's junk-closet rock asks questions like these in sly epics that strip Americana music of its recent purist veneer and put the mess back into it. Shannon McArdle, a brainy Cher to Timothy Bracy's Sonny, speaks for the thrown, raging against soldier-rapists, stalker exes and George W. Bush (her key line: "I am going to crack this case apart"). Bracy's more of a "pushed" man, dismantling disenchantment with a grin (his: "It's our limitations/That make us what we are"). Buoyed by a band that mixes sweet and salty, their dialogue celebrates complexity—unwise, perhaps, in a time of big gestures, but rewarding. Political without preaching, sexy in a bookish way, this record will keep you up talking with someone you'd like to kiss.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: "Catch a Collapsing Star," "Mysterious in Black," "The Lethal Temptress"

I LOVE THIS CD!

JAIME KING
Model/Actress, *Sin City*

KINGS OF LEON
AHA SHAKE HEARTBREAK *RCA*

"It's a fun CD. You can dance to it and work out to it and rock out. I never get tired of them, which is the sign of a superior band."

PUBLIC ENEMY

NEW WHIRL ODOR ✪✪

SLAMJAMZ

The Black CNN sounds more like Lou Dobbs than Anderson Cooper these days

As the title—a pun that was kinda funny about 15 years ago—reminds us, Public Enemy have been around long enough to rail against not one but two Bush administrations. On their ninth album, though, frontman Chuck D directs his righteous anger at kids today too. "The world begins and ends at the tip of their nose," he shouts over a metal-edged hook, whining that said schnozzes are more often pointed toward Xbox controllers than textbooks. For a revolutionary, he sounds an awful lot like a detention monitor. There's some sharp commentary here, too,

KING: JON KOPALOFF/FILMMAGIC.COM; MARS VOLTA: SEBASTIAN ARTZ

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Rubin to Diamond: "You're right, we should be sitting on the other side."

SONGS SUNG BLUE

SCHLOCK-POP KING GRABS ACOUSTIC GUITAR, PEERS INTO THE ABYSS

NEIL DIAMOND

12 SONGS ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

NEIL DIAMOND IS the thinking man's schlockmeister. He's spent more than three decades wrapping himself in sequins, swathing his songs in arena-cabaret bombast and commanding the lustful devotion of a menopausal audience twice as rabid as Tom Jones's. But through it all, Diamond has remained an eccentric, with a booming rasp of a voice that veers at unlikely moments into stentorian talk-singing, and a mile-wide melancholic streak that marks him as one pop's great brooders. And even his most ridiculous bursts of Vegas-style pomp have rested on a foundation of sturdy, shapely melody—a reminder that Diamond is the guardian of a legendary songbook whose range encompasses virtually every style of pre-1977 popular music. How many songwriters would dare put their catalogues up against "Red, Red Wine," "Sweet Caroline," "Song Sung Blue," "I'm a Believer" and "Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon"?

In recent years, Diamond has recorded fewer and fewer original songs, and a self-mocking cameo in *Saving Silverman* seemed to signal that he had entered that final phase of career oblivion, as an ironic kitsch icon. So it was a welcome surprise when word came last year that Diamond was hunkered down in a Los Angeles studio with Rick Rubin, the mega-producer behind Johnny Cash's 1990s career revival. In interviews, Rubin promised to downsize Diamond's sound, to strip away the sheen and reveal the craftsman-titan beneath.

But on *12 Songs*, Rubin has done more than return Diamond to his Brill Building roots: He has unleashed the singer's inner Man in Black. From the first notes of "Oh Mary," the stunning album opener, it's clear this is not the Diamond last seen dodging brassieres while thundering through another version of "America." The sounds are earthy and foreboding: low, tolling piano chords, a scraping acoustic guitar, and a husky, weather-beaten singing voice, delivering lines almost gothic in their starkness ("Let the chance go by/It may never come again/I've been around and I know what happens/And I'm too old to pretend"). Indeed, the whole album finds the 64-year-old Diamond in lion-in-winter mode, confronting the passage of time and fast-approaching death with Cash-like grit and resignation. Even in the chiming "Save Me a Saturday Night," one of the album's sprightlier songs, shadows creep in. "I've been waiting so long … Time is hurrying on," Diamond sings.

Rubin has wisely kept things quiet, pushing Diamond's voice and rhythm guitar out front, forsaking drums almost altogether, and flavoring the legato ballads with glockenspiel, vibes, strings and some tasteful guitar work by studio aces Mike Campbell and Smokey Hormel. The result is something of a songcraft master class, with stops at jazz-pop, country blues, ragtime and, in the organ-powered "Man of God," the most touching gospel testimonial ever written by a Jewish sexagenarian who's not Bob Dylan.

But it's the death-haunted stuff that hits hardest. The album's centerpiece is "Hell Yeah," a wildly self-mythologizing ballad à la "My Way." "He saw it all/He walked the line/Never had to crawl," Diamond bellows, and it's clear he doesn't need a 60-piece orchestra to summon arena-sized bluster. Few performers stick around long enough—or have the chutzpah—to write their own epitaphs. With Rubin's help, Diamond has ensured that his Old Man and the Abyss album is a career best.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Oh Mary," "Hell Yeah," "Save Me a Saturday Night"

MONICA ALMEIDA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

mixed in with more facile name-calling ("Who's the real terrorist?" "Son of a Bush!"). Chuck's basso profundo still suggests his old fire, but by and large his raps are rarely as fascinating as, say, the televised snogging of hypeman Flavor Flav and Brigitte Nielsen.

ANDREW BEAUJON

DOWNLOAD: "Bring That Beat Back"

REDMAN

RED GONE WILD ✪✪✪

DEF JAM

New Jersey MC has smoked so much weed, he forgot what decade this is

For Redman, keeping it real means keeping it poor—to hear him tell it, he's too busy scrounging couches for Olde English money to even consider selling out. This is shtick, of course, but funny shtick. So the problem with Reggie Noble's sixth album isn't that he continually reminds us that his "money's kinda short," it's that his head is stuck in a time when he probably *didn't* have enough change for the bodega: references abound to the film *Falling Down*, Nike's "Just Do It" campaign and TV host Dee Barnes. Instead of feeling vintage, these Clinton-era shout-outs just feel crusty. The hard funk beats are a more raucous kind of throwback (if only we could say the same of an insipid Snoop Dogg guest verse about—guess what?—weed). The best moment is the digital bragfest "Future Thugs," featuring inspired weirdos Ghostface and Ludacris. Otherwise, Redman needs to stop watching *I ♥ the '90s*.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Future Thugs," "Rite Now"

THIONE SECK

ORIENTATION ✪✪✪✪

STERN'S AFRICA

Senegalese singer uses unusual sources to create haunting world music

Thione (pronounced "Choan") Seck was raised on a diet of Bollywood musicals and Arabic radio singers, like many Muslims in Senegal. And where most "world music" looks to the west, Seck's latest album looks east. Singing in his native Wolof, he juxtaposes Indian and Egyptian musicians with an international string section and the hypnotizing beats of Senegalese pop (Seck, who's about 50, once sang with Dave Matthews's Dakar faves Orchestra Baobab), blending traditions without diluting them. In the midst of a remarkably hot year for African CDs—Amadou & Mariam, Ali Farka Touré & Toumani Diabaté, Gangbé Brass Band—this one may be the best. Harmonious, multifaceted and deeply soulful, it's what the U.N. might sound like if its members learned to listen better.

WILL HERMES

DOWNLOAD: "Assalo," "Siiw," "Yaye"

Public Enemy mistakenly believe hype about bus schedules.

PUBLIC ENEMY: WALTER LEAPHART; COOK: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE.COM

SHINEDOWN

US AND THEM ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

Bare-bones gloom from the Sunshine State

BLUE-COLLAR HEAD-BANGERS

Burly and plain-talking, Shinedown singer Brent Smith and his bandmates would be as likely to tune up a tour bus as ride in one. "I'm focused on what I'm after," Smith sang on the Florida-based hard-rock quartet's 2003 debut, seemingly in search of a Phillips head. Despite this regular-dude image, though, Shinedown are savvy alt-rock ragpickers. Stiff-riffing guitarist Jasin Todd has clearly studied at the Nickelback Institute of Melodic Heft, while Smith, who here ruminates over addiction and resentment, does a better Chris Cornell than the guy from Audioslave. Which doesn't detract from *Us and Them*'s modest appeal: Now that modern rock is ruled by wiseacres with appetites for fashion, earnest, no-frills fare like this carries an unexpected whiff of novelty.

MIKAEL WOOD

DOWNLOAD: "Save Me," "Yer Majesty"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DANE COOK
Comedian, *Comedy Central Presents: Dane Cook*

BOB NEWHART
SOMETHING LIKE THIS ... THE BOB NEWHART ANTHOLOGY
RHINO/WEA

"He had impeccable timing, and it's good to study the recordings of the masters. Besides, a man can only listen to so much Meat Loaf and Steve Miller."

THE STANDARD

ALBATROSS ✪✪✪✪

YEP ROC

Artsy Portland, Oregon, five-piece recall the exciting days when Radiohead still played guitars

The Standard are so underground that even the underground hasn't heard of them. On their fourth album in six years, Tim Putnam lays fragile vocals and haunting piano melodies over tightly wound postpunk rhythms that add immediacy to lyrics about missed opportunities and broken relationships. "Not Asleep" and "How Deep to Cut" evoke the beauty of R.E.M.'s *Automatic for the People* as filtered through Radiohead's prog-rock sonic games. "Play the Part" laments that the drugs just don't work, while "In Waves" builds slowly to an avalanche of guitars as Putnam contemplates despair and inarticulateness. Or so it seems—his lyrics are pretty damn mystifying, which might explain why the Standard are a cult band without a cult.

JAMES BARBER

DOWNLOAD: "Closed Rooms," "A Curtain Drawn"

SUN KIL MOON

TINY CITIES ✪✪✪✪

CALDO VERDE

Modest Mouse songs fail to cure deep depression

Mark Kozelek's new album consists entirely of Modest Mouse covers—a concept as peculiar as it is irrelevant. The mopemeister behind Red House Painters and now Sun Kil Moon has previously made songs by AC/DC, the Cars and Paul McCartney sound nothing like the originals and a lot like each other. He could have recorded an album of Hilary Duff tunes and it would have ended up like this. Hearing him unrecognizably transform the Northwest band's herky-jerky indie rants into slow, sinuous, achingly gorgeous dirges, you realize that Kozelek, with his

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Madonna: "Why yes, I am available for bar mitzvahs!"

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

GET DOWN!

OUT: POLITICS AND FOLK-SINGING. IN: '80S AND ROLLER DISCO

MADONNA

CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

MAN, EVERYONE'S A critic. Even the guy who tends the grave of a 16th-century Kabbalah scholar. "The sage Isaac is holy and pure," this rabbi told reporters. "Immodest people can't sing about him."

Immodest? Madonna?

Obviously he missed reports that this album is a low-key affair, written by just Madonna and her tours' musical director, Stuart Price, between trips to pick up Lourdes from polo and drop Rocco at Ashtanga-for-Tots. Yes, one song delves into the mystery of Kabbalah's founder and, OK, she conducts a bit of guided visualization over ravey synth washes. But mostly Madonna is modest here, for Madonna. Instead of the rapping geopolitical analyst of 2003's *American Life*, here's the real thing: a 47-year-old disco den-mother with a big heart and Wal-Mart ears.

Unlike last album's pat I'm-insecure pseudo-disclosures, the only confessions here flick at her past as club kid and '80s queen. There's a Blondie bassline here, a Sister Sledge lyric bite there and "Get Together," which evokes both early-'80s dance giants the S.O.S. Band and early-'80s dance giant Madonna. Opener "Hung Up" strikes a hypnotic, retro-futurist balance between the planetarium jams of *Ray of Light* and the chic Euro-funk of *Music*.

For such a career-long provocateur, there's little here to provoke. It's possible that the woman whose decades-long spiritual quest managed to offend several world religious leaders has found salvation in the House of Donna Summer. But it also sounds as if she's happy to give the people what they want: escapism and nostalgia, and easy on the U.S-bashing, Miss Fancypants. On "I Love New York," she even sings, "Paris and London, baby/You can keep." In her current life as children's author and English matron, this just might pass as punk.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Hung Up," "Get Together," "Jump"

MADONNA'S CURRENT LISTENING

GOLDFRAPP
SUPERNATURE *MUTE*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
2046: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK EMI

weeping guitar and tingling sigh of a voice, doesn't cover songs so much as liquefy them. It's a strange, underappreciated talent: A folk-rock anti-Midas, he reduces everything he touches to a molten core of sadness.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Neverending Math Equation," "Tiny Cities Made of Ashes," "Space Travel Is Boring"

LEWIS TAYLOR

STONED ✪✪✪✪

HACKTONE

Blue-eyed bedroom obsessive bares his psychedelic soul

Hailed by savvy (if hype-prone) Brits as the greatest R&B talent to emerge in a decade, the London multi-instrumentalist Lewis Taylor finally gets a gussied-up Stateside release of the shimmering jewel he self-released in 2002. Though the 39-year-old Taylor splits the production chores, he does everything else himself: luscious acid-head arrangements, keening vocals in a Marvin Gaye mold, sci-fi electronica bits and guitar playing that shimmies confidently between sly wah-wah and princely distortion. With allusions to Led Zeppelin, Ravel and Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, Taylor's soul is definitely blue-eyed, and the gorgeous a cappella Brian Wilson cover that closes the album perfectly reflects the singer's bent barbershop harmonies. Slinky without being sleazy, weirder than its tastiness suggests, *Stoned* is a trippy mantra for playful dirty minds.

ERIK DAVIS

DOWNLOAD: "Stoned Pt.1," "Positively Beautiful," "Til the Mornin' Light"

ASTONISHING FACT!
In 2003, THRICE guitarist Teppei Teranishi was chased around a parking lot by sledgehammer-wielding funnyman Gallagher.

THRICE

VHEISSU ✪✪✪

ISLAND

Screamo stars discover keyboards, get atmospheric

If a bunch of SoCal hardcore kids actually managed to graft Fugazi's indignant roar to Iron Maiden's guitar gallop, you'd think they'd be satisfied, right? Not Thrice, who on their fourth album push beyond volume and velocity into a world of sprawling, mid-tempo arrangements and esoteric influences. It's a bold move, and it yields interesting results; updated field hollers blend smoothly with a maelstrom of power chords on "The Earth Will Shake," and the electric piano and drum machine duet that opens "Atlantic" has the requisite oceanic feel. But with compelling full-on screamers like "Image of the Invisible" and "Hold Fast Hope," it's a shame Thrice are in such a hurry to grow up.

TOM BEAUJOUR

DOWNLOAD: "Image of the Invisible," "Hold Fast Hope"

ALI FARKA TOURÉ & TOUMANI DIABATÉ

IN THE HEART OF THE MOON ✪✪✪

WORLD CIRCUIT/NONESUCH

Two African masters in a casual mode

Guitarist Ali Farka Touré and kora player Toumani Diabaté are both stars in Mali, but they'd barely ever played together before they recorded these first-take jams—mostly on Malian standards from the '50s, with a few originals thrown in. The formula's the same throughout the album: They lock into a groove, Touré repeats each song's fingerpicked acoustic riff, and Diabaté shreds on his quiet, harp-like instrument. (Occasionally there's also some subtle and totally unnecessary additional instrumentation, overdubbed by L.A. guitarist Ry Cooder and others.) It's uniformly calm, tingly and pretty—if you're not paying attention, it just sounds like NPR background music. Focus on it, though, and you can hear Touré and Diabaté showing off for each other, executing impossibly agile, flickering solos.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "Kaira," "Kadi Kadi"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

I BELIEVE TO MY SOUL ✪✪✪

WORK SONG/HEAR/RHINO

Giants of '70s soul, produced by Madonna's brother-in-law

It's nice to see musical veterans reclaim the spotlight, but beyond the cozy buzz of nostalgia, most comeback LPs are pale echoes of distant heydays. This soul elders super-session was assembled by Joe Henry—an imaginatively tradition-minded singer-songwriter turned imaginatively tradition-minded producer—and its loose jams survive comparisons to classics by not straining to emulate them. Gospel-pop furnace Mavis Staples and R&B queen Irma Thomas still have great pipes, Missy Elliott–sample Ann Peebles and ex-Beatles sideman Billy Preston less so. But smoldering arrangements pick up the slack: Thick with blowsy Hammond organ and bayou piano (the latter by New Orleans writer-

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SYNC OR SWIM

WITH *SNL* BEHIND HER, THE POP PRINCESS RETURNS

ASHLEE SIMPSON

I AM ME ✪✪

GEFFEN

LAST YEAR, ASHLEE Simpson went from reality-TV underdog to teen-pop martyr, pilloried for the sin of artificiality. October's Syncgate, the funniest thing on *Saturday Night Live* in years, was just the beginning. A squawking, unmistakably live performance at the Orange Bowl backfired a few months later, setting off a flurry of "Stop Ashlee" online petitions. Her very name is synonymous with fraud: The practice of spamming web forums with phony raves (which her record company reportedly did) is now known as "Ashleeturfing."

All this outrage seems silly, even irrational, since the whole point of *The Ashlee Simpson Show* was the fabrication of stardom. Still, it allows her to reprise the role of triumphant victim that she played to perfection on her hit debut, *Autobiography*, which paired grrrl swagger with the oblivious self-pity of someone whose idea of a disadvantaged youth was not having her own reality series.

I Am Me, as its Zen-koan title suggests, likewise contemplates matters of identity and self-presentation. But the songs are soggier, the sentiments more banal. Only on the first single, "Boyfriend," does Simpson manage *Autobiography*'s junior Courtney Love irritability. "I didn't steal your boyfriend," she snaps with a prickly defensiveness that makes you think she might have, backed by an antsy riff that could have pogoed in from a Hot Hot Heat album.

The *SNL* fallout should have been good for a few snarls; instead we get repentant ballads like "Catch Me When I Fall" and "Beautifully Broken." What this sophomore slump most obviously lacks is the hunger that passed for personality the first time around. Outselling Jessica may be the worst thing that could have happened to Ashlee. Sibling rivalry is a powerful motivator—its absence leaves a vacuum that not even nationally televised humiliation can fill.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Boyfriend"

ASHLEE SIMPSON'S CURRENT LISTENING

FIONA APPLE
EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE *EPIC*

BLONDIE
PARALLEL LINES *CHRYSALIS*

arranger Allen Toussaint, who also sings), they suggest vibe can be greater than the sum of its parts.

WILL HERMES

DOWNLOAD: Mavis Staples, "Keep On Pushing"; Irma Thomas, "The Same Love That Made Me Laugh"; Allen Toussaint, "Turvalon"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

BIG BOI PRESENTS ... GOT PURP? VOL. 2 ✪✪✪

PURPLE RIBBON/VIRGIN

Outkast member launches new label, celebrates weed strong enough to kill Superman

DIRTY SOUTH ORGY!

WARNING: This album features no drum & bass interpretations of John Coltrane, no lyrics about silverback orangutans and no MCs in sparkly green codpieces. On a showcase for his new label, Big Boi proves that even though he's the straight man in Outkast, he's still one of hip-hop's most vital innovators—call him Antwan2500. He stocks these shelves with adventurous crunk ("Kryptonite"), *X-Files*-spooky strip-club jams ("Claremont Lounge") and spastic, spare electro ("808"). The best songs here feature familiar Dirty Southerners Killer Mike, Bun B and Bubba Sparxxx—then there's a mess of hard-to-distinguish, albeit raucous, third-stringers. For his own part, Big Boi elevates three songs with idiosyncratic speed-raps, reminding us that nearly anywhere besides his day job, he's the main attraction.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Kryptonite," "Claremont Lounge," "808"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

SO AMAZING: AN ALL-STAR TRIBUTE TO LUTHER VANDROSS ✪✪✪

J RECORDS

Remembrances of a ballad star who had a paralyzing stroke in 2003, died in July

All Dessert All the Time: That's what Luther Vandross served up in a musical kitchen where the house specialty was the richest, fluffiest chocolate soufflé ever concocted. In vocal terms it translated into cooing melismas that trailed off into misty sighs; in sexual terms, it promised hours of dreamy foreplay that subsided into cuddling. None of the pop and soul luminaries who cover his hits here has as creamy a voice, although Usher's reverential take on "Superstar" is just as passionate. In "Anyone Who Had a Heart," Elton John sings a posthumous duet with Vandross à la Natalie and Nat "King" Cole. Aretha Franklin's tangy, gospel-flavored "A House Is Not a Home"

JAMES WHITE

flashes with personality, and Celine Dion's "Dance With My Father" conveys a keening sadness. Like the typical top-of-the-line tribute, this one is star-studded and respectful but rarely transporting.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD: Usher, "Superstar"; Celine Dion, "Dance With My Father"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND: THE SOUNDTRACK ✪✪

VAGRANT

Skate videogame pairs young punks against old punk songs. Wipeouts ensue

Warning to purists: This review concerns a skateboarding videogame soundtrack on which contemporary bands "reinterpret" punk classics. If you didn't just throw up in your mouth, feel free to continue. Young turks Senses Fail and Thrice acquit themselves with barebones versions of Suicidal Tendencies and Minor Threat songs, respectively—though neither make a case for the necessity of said versions. Much better are the few artists who chose songs that fit their own M.O. to a T—My Chemical Romance vamp and camp their way through Misfits' "Astro Zombies" and Alkaline Trio use their swagger and snarl to own T.S.O.L.'s "Wash Away." As for Emanuel (the Stooges) and the Bled (Bad Brains), their imitations are certainly sincere, but hardly flattering.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: My Chemical Romance, "Astro Zombies"

THE WARLOCKS

SURGERY ✪✪✪

MUTE

Indie journeyman trades stints with Beck and the Brian Jonestown Massacre for place in the sun, *Billboard*

Three guitar players, two drummers, their first record contract signed in blood: Bobby Hecksher's Warlocks do nothing by halves, and after two albums of hypnotic, fuzzed-up drone-rock, he's ready to say hi to a public who don't necessarily wear black or own Jesus and Mary Chain records.

I LOVE THIS CD!

KIRSTEN DUNST
Actress, *Elizabethtown, The Virgin Suicides*

THE SUNDAYS
READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC *DGC*

"There's a song on there called 'Here's Where the Story Ends' that's really special to me. It's on my iPod."

SANTANA: CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE; DUNST: KURT VINION/WIREIMAGE.COM

Juelz Santana runs the streets, sits on them.

ROCK STAR

HE CALLS HIMSELF "HUMAN CRACK." THAT'S A GOOD THING ...

JUELZ SANTANA

WHAT THE GAME'S BEEN MISSING ✪✪✪✪

DIPLOMATS/DEF JAM

JUELZ SANTANA IS masterfully, intoxicatingly graceless. The Harlem tough "flows" like a backfiring car—"I stay up. My gun tucked. I gives a fuck," he stammers at one point—but his rocky cadences are a choice, not a limitation. They vividly embody his themes: struggle, strife and strength (as in, you've got to have the third to make it through the first two).

Santana is part of Cam'ron's Diplomats, a posse of inventive MCs who wear their contradictions on their sleeves: Their belligerence, misogyny and homophobia coexist alongside an affinity for giant diamond earrings, furs the color of kiwi strawberry Snapple and, here, '60s girl groups. On "Oh Yes," the Marvelettes become drug game cheerleaders; the "wai-ai-ai-ait" from "Please Mr. Postman" is cleverly sampled and rearranged so that it refers to the "weight" Juelz says he's so good at selling. And on "Kid Is Back," a child sings, "This is crack and it's better than ever," to the tune of the Angels' "My Boyfriend's Back." This jumble of bubblegum pop and coke-slinging hard-talk—the feminine and the hypermasculine, the innocent and the corrupt—is beguilingly strange.

So is Santana's wordplay, which alternates between a minimalism that's nearly miserly ("Who want it wit me?/Nobody want it wit me") and ingenious nonsense (at one point he rhymes "bow, lil' man" with "chow lo mein"). His mentor in such badass silliness is Cam'ron, who guest-spots on the dancehall-inflected "Murda Murda": "Killa killa mo' killin' killin' for killa killa," he raps. Name Game, holler!

When the music doesn't revisit the Spector era or tap '80s rock cheese for bombast, it strips away everything but a monstrous thump: Few beats have hit so hard with so little since Clipse's "Grindin'." "There It Go (The Whistle Song)" turns a wolf whistle, the song's only trace of melody, into a fine hook, while "Freaky" is metallic and cavernous, a strip club in a subway tunnel. The best is "Clockwork," which hooks up an egg timer click to a buzzing synth while Juelz makes clock noises. Between alpha male caricatures and Bruckheimer violence, a lot of gangsta rap gets absurd; Santana's is fantastically absurdist.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Clockwork," "Oh Yes," "There It Go (The Whistle Song)"

JUELZ SANTANA'S CURRENT LISTENING

YOUNG JEEZY LET'S GET IT: THUG MOTIVATION 101 *DEF JAM SOUTH*

GREEN DAY AMERICAN IDIOT *REPRISE*

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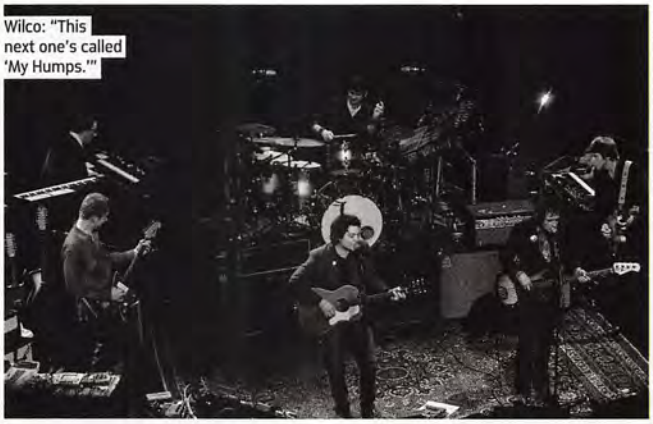
Wilco: "This next one's called 'My Humps.'"

Surgery's canvas—with crushing feedback avalanches ("Come Save Us," "Thursday's Radiation") leavened by mystic psychedelic reveries ("We Need Starpower") and sweet-sounding, rotten-hearted '60s pop ("Angels in Heaven, Angels in Hell")—is broader and brighter, though Hecksher still sounds barely attached to his sanity, and aficionados of sonic gunk and unwashed hair will be happiest. Over the top and steadfastly retro, but in a good way.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Come Save Us," "Angels in Heaven, Angels in Hell"

WILCO

KICKING TELEVISION—LIVE IN CHICAGO ✪✪✪✪

NONESUCH

First concert set from Jeff Tweedy-led sonic pioneers

The point in a show when your favorite band starts playing a tranche of new material—particularly "experimental" new material—is usually a good opportunity to visit the restroom, preferably one in a different county. So it's a testament to the quality of Wilco's recent records that, while they provide a hefty portion of these two CDs, *Kicking Television* still sounds like a greatest hits set—albeit one in which the "hits" have been augmented by the alternately elegant and shred-heavy guitar-playing of new member Nels Cline. Among the older material, Wilco feature a barnstorming take on "Misunderstood," the kind of bitter, slow-burning howl that few but Jeff Tweedy would ever write, and probably only he would consider a suitable opener for a live album. It's the ultimate anti-"Hello Chicago!"

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD: "Misunderstood," "Handshake Drugs" "Via Chicago"

BRIAN WILSON

WHAT I REALLY WANT FOR CHRISTMAS ✪

ARISTA

Pop music's erratic genius delivers a lump of coal for the holidays

Aside from last year's universally adored completion of *SMiLE*, an album he abandoned in 1967, Brian Wilson's solo career has been marred by oddball artistic choices and the sad reality that the Beach Boys mastermind's voice is steadily nearing the end of its endless summer. This chintzy Christmas collection only amplifies these problems, with a breathless Wilson delivering standards like "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and "The First Noel" in a clipped, key-challenged bark that makes for distinctly unmerry listening. Elton John's lyricist Bernie Taupin contributes to the title track, and soft-rock sage Jimmy Webb lends a hand on the gently nostalgic "Christmasey," but only the most obsessive fans will find much joy beyond those two. Wilson rang in the holidays far more engagingly four decades ago on *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album*.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD: "Christmasey"

I LOVE THIS CD!

LAURA LINNEY
Actress, *Love Actually*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*

GILLIAN WELCH
SOUL JOURNEY *ACONY*

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LINNEY: ROBIN PLATZER/FILMMAGIC.COM; WILCO: MICHAEL SEGAL

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STEVIE WONDER

A TIME TO LOVE ✪✪✪✪

MOTOWN

A Motown original, working on his own schedule, comes back softer than ever

CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP

A full decade after his last album, the once unstaunchable font of song turns out to be, who woulda thunk it, an unstaunchable font of song. Maybe he can't control himself—or maybe he works his ass off and won't stop till he knows he's got a good one. He begins with "If Your Love Cannot Be Moved," which targets all those who say they follow Jesus's teachings: "You can't free the slaves to enslave them differently," and other such proverbs. After that comes the time for love songs, which are cornier than ever. But corny love songs are the stuff of pop, and Wonder has a genius for the kind of emotional openness that Coldplay, to choose a random instance, find faintly embarrassing. He returns to the message material at the end, refreshed as if from an excellent orgasm, although the nine-minute title finale does overtax him just a tad.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "If Your Love Cannot Be Moved," "Tell Your Heart I Love You," "Positivity"

YoungBloodz, exhausted after a full day of crunking.

YOUNGBLOODZ

EV'RYBODY KNOW ME ✪✪✪

LAFACE/ZOMBA

Dirty South duo continue to perfect the banger

YoungBloodz began their career opening for Outkast in 1999, but the two Atlanta rap duos have followed opposite career paths. While Outkast explored the outer limits of their squelchy plastic funk and launched themselves into the mainstream, YoungBloodz refined their slow Southern stomp. Their third album is all throbbing bass and huge synthetic horns. Sean Paul and J-Bo have thick, garbled accents that stick to the bottom of their tracks, and their lyrics exclusively concern cars, booze and beating you up. The result is a satisfying trunk-rattler that loses steam only in the final third with ill-advised tracks like "It's Good," the latest in rap's ongoing series of Ying Yang Twins jacks.

TOM BREIHAN

DOWNLOAD: "Grown Man," "Ev'rybody Know Me"

BLENDER APPROVED

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FIONA APPLE

EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE

EPIC

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ALICIA KEYS

UNPLUGGED

J RECORDS

Live from Brooklyn, an intimate, candlelit evening with the über-sincere piano-soul princess.

FRANZ FERDINAND

YOU COULD HAVE IT SO MUCH BETTER ...

EPIC

The suavest Scotsmen alive roar back with stylish riffs and arty in-jokes.

LIL' KIM

THE NAKED TRUTH

ATLANTIC

Straight from the Philadelphia Federal Detention Center comes the Queen Bee's rawest, feistiest set yet.

GIANT DRAG

HEARTS AND UNICORNS

KICKBALL/INTERSCOPE

Sassy co-ed L.A. duo marry dreamy guitar pop with precocious lyrics about sex, drugs and stupid boys.

WOLF PARADE

APOLOGIES TO THE QUEEN MARY

SUB POP

Beautiful, compelling and weird, it's the best album from a ramshackle Canadian indie band in at least three weeks.

JONATHAN MANNION

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POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"WINDOW SHOPPER"	50 CENT	*GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'* G-UNIT/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
2	"HUNG UP"	MADONNA	*CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR* REPRISE
3	"HYPNOTIZE"	SYSTEM OF A DOWN	*HYPNOTIZE* AMERICAN/COLUMBIA
4	"HEARD 'EM SAY"	KANYE WEST FEAT. ADAM LEVINE	*LATE REGISTRATION* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM
5	"DON'T FORGET ABOUT US"	MARIAH CAREY	*THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI* ISLAND
6	"GRILLZ"	NELLY	*SWEAT/SUIT* FO' REAL/UNIVERSAL
7	"WHEN WE MAKE LOVE"	GINUWINE	*BACK II DA BASICS* EPIC
8	"RUN IT"	CHRIS BROWN	*CHRIS BROWN* JIVE/ZOMBA
9	"STAND UP FOR LOVE"	DESTINY'S CHILD	*#1'S* COLUMBIA
10	"MY HUMPS"	BLACK EYED PEAS	*MONKEY BUSINESS* A&M/INTERSCOPE
11	"FIREMAN"	LIL WAYNE	*THA CARTER II* UNIVERSAL/CASH MONEY
12	"WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS"	GREEN DAY	*AMERICAN IDIOT* REPRISE
13	"INSIDE YOUR HEAVEN"	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	*INSIDE YOUR HEAVEN* RCA
14	"BECAUSE OF YOU"	KELLY CLARKSON	*BREAKAWAY* RCA
15	"SOUL SURVIVOR"	YOUNG JEEZY FEAT. AKON	*LET'S GET IT: THUG MOTIVATION 101* DEF JAM SOUTH
16	"TWISTED TRANSISTOR"	KORN	*SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE* EMI/VIRGIN
17	"GOLD DIGGER"	KANYE WEST FEAT. JAMIE FOXX	*LATE REGISTRATION* ROC-A-FELLA
18	"LUXURIOUS"	GWEN STEFANI	*LOVE.ANGEL.MUSIC.BABY.* INTERSCOPE
19	"FEEL GOOD INC."	GORILLAZ	*DEMON DAYS* VIRGIN
20	"BOYFRIEND"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	*I AM ME* GEFFEN
21	"DARE"	GORILLAZ	*DEMON DAYS* VIRGIN
22	"FIX YOU"	COLDPLAY	*X&Y* CAPITOL
23	"THE GREAT DIVIDE"	SCOTT STAPP	*THE GREAT DIVIDE* WIND-UP
24	"SUGAR, WE'RE GOING DOWN"	FALL OUT BOY	*FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE* ISLAND
25	"I'M FEELING YOU"	SANTANA	*ALL THAT I AM* ARISTA
26	"UNBREAKABLE"	ALICIA KEYS	*UNPLUGGED* J RECORDS
27	"PHOTOGRAPH"	NICKELBACK	*ALL THE RIGHT REASONS* ROADRUNNER
28	"GOOD IS GOOD"	SHERYL CROW	*WILDFLOWER* A&M/INTERSCOPE
29	"CONFESSIONS OF A BROKEN HEART"	LINDSAY LOHAN	*A LITTLE MORE PERSONAL* CASABLANCA/UNIVERSAL
30	"YOU'LL THINK OF ME"	KEITH URBAN	*GOLDEN ROAD* CAPITOL NASHVILLE
31	"LIKE YOU"	BOW WOW	*WANTED* COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN
32	"CRAZY"	ALANIS MORISSETTE	*THE COLLECTION* MAVERICK
33	"I'VE GOT A LIFE"	EURYTHMICS	*ULTIMATE COLLECTION* ARISTA
34	"THE SUFFERING"	COHEED AND CAMBRIA	*GOOD APOLLO, I'M BURNING* EQUAL VISION/COLUMBIA
35	"TURN IT UP"	CHAMILLIONAIRE	*THE SOUND OF REVENGE* UNIVERSAL
36	"STRICKEN"	DISTURBED	*TEN THOUSAND FISTS* REPRISE
37	"FALLING"	STAIND	*CHAPTER V* ATLANTIC
38	"PERFECT SITUATION"	WEEZER	*MAKE BELIEVE* GEFFEN
39	"BE MY ESCAPE"	RELIENT K	*MMHMM* CAPITOL/GOTEE
40	"DOA"	FOO FIGHTERS	*IN YOUR HONOR* ROSWELL/RCA

2

MADONNA

"HUNG UP"

CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR

Everyone's favorite not-quite-British, not-quite-Jewish pop mama returns with her first album in two years. Those fellows grinding down at your local discothèque will be happy to hear that there are fewer raps about soy lattes and more four-on-the-floor bliss—as evidenced by this single, which Madge introduced on *TRL*(!) in October.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

8

CHRIS BROWN

"RUN IT"

CHRIS BROWN

This 16-year-old R&B romeo may be the only guy in music whose name makes "Mike Jones" look exciting. The Virginia rookie already has a hit with this sultry joint—produced by doughy beatmaker Scott Storch—about getting freaknasty with girls twice his age. See if it's true when he plays *Regis and Kelly* at the end of November.

16

KORN

"TWISTED TRANSISTOR"

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE

Since Korn's last record, their guitarist left to find Jesus and pretty much everyone else stopped caring about nü-metal. The California screamers will try to battle back with a new album and a national tour in the new year. Sadly, a double bill with the recently reunited Cream has yet to be scheduled. Mmmm … Cream/Korn.

26

ALICIA KEYS

"UNBREAKABLE"

UNPLUGGED

For the lead single from her *Unplugged* album, this New York chanteuse chose this soulful ode to adamantium, the ultra-resilient metal that secret government operatives laced Wolverine's skeleton with in issue No. 134 of … just kidding! She'll play select club dates nationwide through the start of 2006.

MADONNA: CATUFFE/SIPA/NEWSCOM; BROWN: CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE; KORN: CHAPMAN BAEHLER

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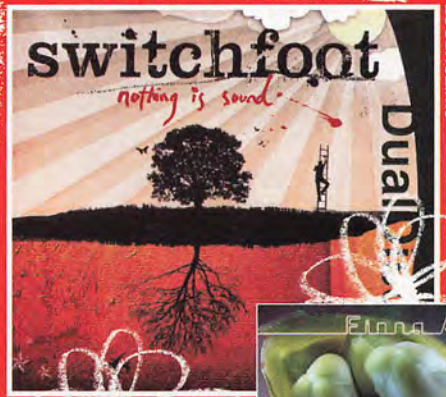
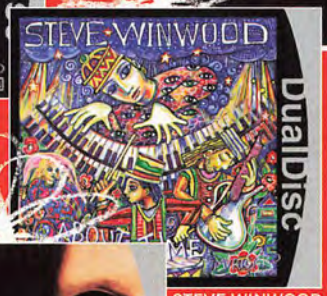
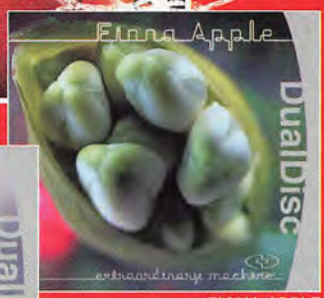


SWITCHFOOT

FRANZ FERDINAND



STEVE WINWOOD



FIONA APPLE

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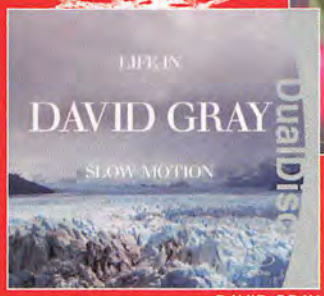

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Talking Heads, 1977 (left to right): Jerry Harrison, Tina Weymouth, plushie, David Byrne and Chris Frantz.

HEADS OF THE CLASS

PREPPY ART-SCHOOL NEW YORKERS MASH PUNK INTO DANCE, RULE U.S. NEW WAVE

TALKING HEADS

TALKING HEADS ✪✪✪✪

RHINO/WARNER BROS.

TALKING HEADS WERE CBGB staples but they never fit in with New York's punk scene. Partly it was because their cleancut image stood out amid the leather-jacket fraternity of juvenile-delinquent wannabes. Mostly it was because they made dance music at a time when punk consensus decreed that disco sucked. Their music imagined what funk would have sounded like if it had been invented by WASPs: You can hear the urge to get down struggling with tight-assed neurosis.

Twitchy, alienated from his own flesh, singer David Byrne had no use for feelings—much like punk's standard-bearer, Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols. Byrne seemed to prefer a life of the mind, all curiosity and fascination, to messy passion. "Why would I want to fall in love?" he asks in the band's second album, *More Songs About Buildings and Food*. And "No Compassion," from the debut, *Talking Heads: 77*, dismisses empathy as burdensome. Yet the music—Byrne's fluttering guitar, the crisp funk of bassist Tina Weymouth and drummer Chris Frantz, Jerry Harrison's darting flickers of keyboard—actually feels like butterflies in your stomach.

With 1979's *Fear of Music*, Byrne widens his reach. The record is astonishingly varied, from a fusion of African music and Dadaist poetry in "I Zimbra" to the radically modernized psychedelia of "Drugs." Talking Heads had struck up a bountiful relationship with producer Brian Eno, and by 1980's *Remain in Light*, the mutually infatuated Byrne and Eno resembled a pair of cerebrally over-endowed Siamese twins. Obsessed with African polyrhythms, they built songs by layers, from multiple bass-pulses, percussion lines and graffiti-like smears of synth. It's Byrne's grail, tribal music for faithless postmoderns, a trance-dance sound to heal the spiritual emptiness his lyrics evoke. "Listening Wind" goes further, seeing the West through the eyes of a terrorist disgusted by American Coca-colonialism.

The new approach caused intolerable strains in the group, so Byrne agreed to part with Eno and revert to taut tunefulness. The awkwardly transitional *Speaking in Tongues* (1983) generated their biggest hit, "Burning Down the House," but its jewel was "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)," an exquisite love song devoid of romantic cliché.

As Byrne came to terms with commonplace emotions he also began to sentimentalize common people, sacrificing the tension that gave Talking Heads their edge. Paralleling a general mid-'80s shift towards Americana, *Little Creatures* replaced funk with pedal steel guitars. The next year, *True Stories* plunged wholesale into the heartland—terrain Byrne had scorned eight years earlier in "The Big Country," sneering "I wouldn't live there if you paid me to."

Naked, a 1988 swan song, returned to world music influences, inspired by the quicksilver guitars of recent Afro-pop like the Bhundu Boys. With their most breezy, beatific songs, it sounded like the work of a rejuvenated band reaching a third wind. But the Heads split shortly after its release, and Byrne has vowed they'll never re-form.

With crisp remasters of their eight studio albums, garnished with outtakes (including a wonderful overwrought version of "Mind"), rare video footage and 5.1 mixes, this box renders redundant 2003's unwieldy *Once in a Lifetime* package, though casual fans might wait until the first four CDs are sold separately. Eno, a crucial catalyst for that golden era, recently claimed that he sees the influence of Talking Heads everywhere. If only!

Talking Heads' adventurousness has proved largely inimitable. Okay, over the years, bands—Orange Juice and Meat Puppets in the '80s, Franz Ferdinand and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah more recently—have picked up on the group's early style, the irresistible jangle-funk of "Pulled Up" and "Found a Job." But why haven't bands ransacked the Heads oeuvre for the dozens of other tangents? Entire careers—genres even—could have been built off single songs on *Fear of Music* or *Remain in Light*.

SIMON REYNOLDS

DOWNLOAD: "Warning Sign," "Seen and Not Seen," "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)"

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THE SCORE	
✪✪✪✪✪	A CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
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BRYAN ADAMS

ANTHOLOGY ✪✪✪✪

A&M/CHRONICLES/UME

Bad-skinned Canadian showcases genius for the generic, makes history

After 70 years and 419 albums of unassuming guitar hits ("Cuts Like a Knife," "Heaven"), bombastic soundtrackers ("(Everything I Do) I Do It for You") and celebrity duets (the best redone here with Pamela Anderson replacing Sweatsuit Spice's epochal vocal), Bryan Adams is revealed as a pastiche of pastiche, mediocre not through failure but through passionate effort. Not despite but because of this, Mr. Adams is the greatest rock singer of all time; one could rebuild music history with nothing but this collection, perfectly representative down to the needless second disc (so we'll know how hits packages worked). If aliens visit Earth after civilization has melted away, *Anthology* above any document will explain what it meant to "rock" in our times, how majestic and awful it all was, from the Summer of '69 to the end of the world.

JANE DARK

DOWNLOAD: "Somebody," "It's Only Love," "This Time"

ANTHRAX

ANTHROLOGY: NO HIT WONDERS (1985–1991) ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

NYC metal mavens who enjoyed unwanted attention during anthrax attacks of 2001

Though their biggest legacy is helping set a template for rap-metal—with "Bring tha Noize," their crack 1991 collaboration with Public Enemy, included here—Anthrax were once among the world's foremost speed-metal purists. This 30-song catalogue of their prime, when Joey BellaDonna led the band's onslaughts with his unhinged wail and anti-violence, positive-punk politics, rarely deviates from the amps-to-11 blueprint of oi!-style shouts, pummeling beats, power solos and epic, tempo-shifting song structures. One notable exception, the manic Beastie Boys spoof "I'm the Man," epitomizes the band's comic side. This sense of humor, along with formal tweaks (the jangly opening to

Beasties: Boys in the hoods.

Bryan Adams: It's her left hand that's making him smile.

"Antisocial"), topical if inelegant lyrics (the manifest destiny critique "Indians") and BellaDonna's sense of melody help contour the songs, but in the end they're mainly sonic juggernauts. These aren't hits—they're more like crushing blows.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Bring tha Noize," "Lone Justice"

ART OF NOISE

DAFT ✪✪✪✪

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

WELCOME TO THE PLEASUREDOME ✪✪

808 STATE

808:88:98 ✪✪✪

ZTT

Three high-concept acts from a high-concept '80s Brit label that specialized in outrage and synthesizers

From Trevor Horn's spectacular production to the witty erudition of Paul Morley's liner notes, ZTT was one of the most artful record labels of all time. How the music stands up today is less clear. Frankie Goes to Hollywood were a scandalous sensation in the U.K., where they followed the banned single "Relax," a gay Hi-NRG club anthem turbocharged by Horn into a Phil Spector-on-amyl-nitrite epic, with the equally huge disco-metal stampede "Two Tribes." Ostensibly an anti-nuclear protest, the song actually seems to exult in the imminence of apocalypse. But *Pleasuredome* proved to be a bloated farrago whose several low points include a cover of "Born to Run" that makes Springsteen's original sound underblown. Art of Noise's sample-based music has aged far better. A trio of session musicians and studio technicians operating under the musical direction of Horn and the aesthetic guidance of Morley, their absurdist collages of big beats and wacky voices drew a cool line between European Dada and Bronx B-boy. Signed during ZTT's later flirtation with techno, 808 State's atmospheric instrumentals are a logical extension of AON's danceable abstraction. By this point, ZTT had dropped all the conceptualist framing. The superior first half of this 808 anthology revels in the universal language of rhythm, texture and mood, give or take the occasional blight of a cheesy sax melody or some embarrassing British rapping.

SIMON REYNOLDS

DOWNLOAD: Frankie Goes to Hollywood, "Relax"; Art of Noise, "Moments in Love"; 808 State, "CobraBora"

I LOVE THIS CD!

STEPHEN COLBERT
Host, *The Colbert Report*

NELLIE MCKAY
GET AWAY FROM ME
COLUMBIA

"She's a musical prodigy with a sense of humor about herself. She has a mature style, and you can't believe someone so young is writing songs like hers."

BEASTIE BOYS

SOLID GOLD HITS ✪✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Original hits, by the original artists, in this handsomely bound best-of Beasties

Somehow the Beastie Boys have made it to 24 without their voices changing. The eternal *enfants terribles* are thus celebrating with their first single-disc hit compilation, showing just how large a sneaker-print they've left on the world thus far. Unlike early curio-heavy discs, these 15 tracks are pitched slow and down the middle: heavy on the Old School, light on the Buddhist space-jams, with the blockbusters that put them on the map ("Fight for Your Right") and kept them tastemakers since—'89's "Shake Your Rump," '92's "So What'cha Want," '94's "Sabotage" and on up to three cuts from last year. It's a giddy ride through two decades of hipster shenanigans, and it could prompt many a reconsideration. Even the album cover—an archival blackmail shot of the early-'80s trio rocking tragic doo-rags, smooth cheeks and shiny sweatsuits—rebukes anyone who charged them with sexism, piracy or other sins in the wild early days. Look at 'em! They were babies!

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Fight for Your Right," "Sabotage," "Shake Your Rump"

JOHNNY CASH

THE COMPLETE SUN RECORDINGS, 1955–1958 ✪✪✪✪✪

TIME-LIFE

A young badass walks the line, casts long shadow

JOHNNY CASH BOX SET OF THE MONTH

Yep: There are too damn many Johnny Cash compilations. But this set of 61 tracks recorded by a young man in black at Memphis's Sun Studio—as important a catalogue as the one made there around the same time by a dude named Elvis—stands alone for its tight historical focus and ballsy consistency. No case needs to be made for signatures like "Folsom Prison Blues" and "I Walk the Line," which pioneered Cash's fusion of country darkness and rock swagger. He also lashed many other doozies to his trademark steam-train rhythm, like "Mean Eyed Cat" (a mixtape match for Kanye's "Gold Digger"), the stop-boozing plea "Leave That Junk Alone" and pop corn like "Sugartime." His early life

BEASTIES: DANNY CLINCH; ADAMS: BRYAN ADAMS; COLBERT: ROBIN PLATZER/FILMMAGIC.COM

Unsurprisingly, this airline has also gone bankrupt.

MILE-HIGH CLUB

HEAVILY TATTOOED SOCAL TRIO BECOME THE KINGS OF MALL-PUNK, ONE GLORIOUS HOOK—AND FART JOKE—AT A TIME

BLINK-182

GREATEST HITS ★★★★★

GEFFEN

BACK WHEN MARK Hoppus was struggling with three notes on his bass and cracking "There are only so many ways I can make love to my hand," few could have predicted blink-182's ascent to punk royalty, and no one could have foreseen their apparent swan song, 2003's elegiac and varied *blink-182*, a blueprint for what pop-punk could sound like after it passed puberty. But all the evidence is presented on this nearly flawless compilation: From the boy-meets-girl/girl-drives-because-boy-got-drunk narrative of 1997's "Josie" to the affecting pathos of 1999's suicide-cautioning "Adam's Song," the quick transformation of Hoppus (low voice) and guitarist Tom DeLonge (squealy voice) from nudists to near geniuses is downright astonishing.

All of blink's staples are present and accounted for, from the early fan favorite "Dammit" (with its pessimistic snarl "I guess this is growing up!") to the two breakthrough singles from 1999's *Enema of the State* (har har!), "What's My Age Again?" and "All the Small Things," which, freed from their towel-snapping videos (the former featured streaking, the latter's a spot-on boy-band spoof), reveal themselves to be charmingly goofy and endearing.

Thanks to the arrival of megadrummer and noted shirt-allergist Travis Barker, by 2000's "Man Overboard" the trio perfected its shtick: dueling he said/he said vocal melodies and chemically addictive choruses held down by Barker's audio-Adderall tom-tom pounding. Instead of settling, though, Hoppus and Delonge pushed past the confines of punk and allowed their changing lives—success, marriage, the need to wear pants—into their music.

The result was *blink-182*, a creative leap as unexpected as watching a toddler transform overnight into a grad student. "Feelin' This" and "Always" are catchy and energetic, but now the doofy enthusiasm is laced with a genuine melancholy that today's screamo strivers would trade their white belts for. This actually was growing up. Too bad, then, that they've vanished into a reality-show hogging, side-project recording, ominous-sounding "indefinite hiatus."

Greatest Hits is rounded out by a previously unreleased outtake from the last album, the throbbing "Not Now," and the band's final recording from earlier this year, a spacey cover of British punk godfathers the Only Ones' "Another Girl, Another Planet," a nod to the past that, unfortunately, provides no glimpse into the future. For the last decade, nobody has expressed the joy and absurdity of young life with more heart and hooks—and dick jokes—than blink-182. Let's hope Mark, Tom and Travis will, like their song suggested, "Stay Together for the Kids." The kids need them.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: "Dammit," "Man Overboard," "First Date"

UNDER THE INFLUENCES

SINGER-GUITARIST-MOLLY RINGWALD FAN **TOM DELONGE** LOOKS BACK AT HIS INSPIRATIONS

THE FIRST RECORD I BOUGHT with my own money was *Horse Bites, Dog Cries* by the L.A. punk band D.I. I was in sixth grade. My mom came in while I was listening to the song "No Moms" and she threw the album in the trash. It was a total suburban moment.

GROWING UP IN San Diego, skateboarding and music were one and the same. I painted a big mural of the *Thrasher* magazine logo on my bedroom wall.

I WAS MADLY INSPIRED by the John Hughes movies *Sixteen Candles* and *Pretty in Pink* because I love New Wave music and culture.

WE WERE ON THE WARPED TOUR in Europe, maybe eight years ago, and Jim, the singer from Pennywise, said, "We gotta go see the Chemical Brothers." We just smoked a lot of pot and I couldn't even move. He drags me over and there's 50,000 people jumping up and down. That's when I realized, "Shit, I gotta get better at what I'm doing."

AS I STARTED MAKING MONEY, I started paying attention to who was in power and how they got there, which got me obsessed about politics. Long before he ran for the presidency, I had a collage of John Kerry on the wall in our studio. The only reason he didn't win the election is he didn't want to fight dirty.

RULE BY SECRECY by Jim Marrs—that book will fuck you up. This makes you wonder about God, pyramids, freemasons and aliens—it's a real-life version of *The Da Vinci Code*. *STEVE KANDELL*

DeLonge: passionate about politics, lip rings.

BLINK-182: SYE WILLIAMS/CORBIS OUTLINE; DELONGE: ESTAVAN ORIOL

may now be the stuff of biopics, but here's the real document.

WILL HERMES

DOWNLOAD: "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Big River," "Get Rhythm"

MILES DAVIS

THE CELLAR DOOR SESSIONS ✪✪✪✪

LEGACY/COLUMBIA

Intrepid jazz trumpeter shocks traditionalists, hires a guitarist, plays in a purple haze

Dark nights of the soul don't get any funkier than this. While jazzbos in 1970 griped about trumpeter Miles Davis's going electric, the spooky, vicious music on these six CDs was no sellout. For three nights at the Cellar Door club in D.C., Davis led a sextet that he kept on edge. Pianist Keith Jarrett, assigned to the plinky-dink Fender Rhodes electric, responded with solos like fistfuls of broken glass. Michael Henderson on bass, Jack DeJohnette on drums and Airto Moreira on percussion aligned for funk vamps or brawled around the beat; Davis and saxophonist Gary Bartz scurried, cackled and screamed. On the fourth night (which was excerpted on the 1971 Davis album *Live/Evil*) the speed-fingered, wah-wah teasing, meteoric guitarist John McLaughlin joined as a seventh member, and Davis's volatile mixture of earthy and abstract flared even hotter.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: "Inamorata" (Disc 6), "Honky Tonk" (Disc 5), "Directions" (Disc 6)

EURYTHMICS

ULTIMATE COLLECTION ✪✪✪

ARISTA

New Wave ultrastars' greatest hits tell an '80s cautionary tale

Sequenced more or less chronologically, this singles inventory documents a career that mirrored the go-go '80s: Eurythmics' severe synth-pop, a staple on early MTV, soon gave way to bigger if not always better soul-rock excesses that increasingly indulged Annie Lennox's plush diva pipes and Dave Stewart's taste for overproduction. On this two-decade-spanning collection, which adds to but fails to improve on 1991's *Greatest Hits*, the oldest songs tend to be the least dated. The more recent material—a leaden pair of new ballads and some forgettable filler from 1999's droopy comeback, *Peace*—only serves as a reminder that as this British duo grew more versatile, going from gender-bending new wave to genre-straddling pastiche, they also became more conventional.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Here Comes the Rain Again," "There Must Be an Angel (Playing With My Heart)"

Kurt gloats after decapitating his bandmates.

NIRVANA: PICTORIAL PRESS; DESTINY'S CHILD: TONY DURAN

GENESIS

PLATINUM COLLECTION ✪✪✪

RHINO/ATLANTIC

Wizardly Brits evolve from epics to ditties in just three decades

With Peter Gabriel as its lead singer (1967–1975), Genesis spun fanciful tales into complex prog-rock suites. Then drummer Phil Collins (1975–1996) took over the mic, Genesis shifted to more straightforward pop and the platinum albums

OOH, CHILD

HOUSTON GIRL GROUP MAKES EARLY CASE FOR IMMORTALITY

DESTINY'S CHILD

#1'S ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

DESTINY'S CHILD ARE a perfect storm of a trio. Craftily managed by lead singer Beyoncé Knowles's father, the group was trimmed of mutinous members, and between their bootylicious bods, the best young voices in R&B and bubble-yum tracks like "No, No, No Part 1" (1998) and "Bills, Bills, Bills" (1999), quickly blew free of the now-forgotten girl-group competition. Don't sit around waiting for a *#1's* collection from 702 or Total.

Who were these chicks, anyway? Raggedy Anns whose bills needed paying? Vixens who commanded suitors to "Say My Name"? Both, actually, which made them cuter, more talented versions of the girls in the audience: strong, sexual (as opposed to just sexy) and sometimes waiting by the BlackBerry.

As DC's strength rose to hurricane proportions with "Bootylicious" and "Independent Women Part 2," they pulled back. The tease is one of their favorite themes—after three CDs, they left fans hanging by declaring a hiatus. Each made a solo album, capped by the hip, focused pop of Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love*.

When the trio came back last year with the audacious *Destiny Fulfilled*, it was clear they'd been dosed by Beyoncé's choice to unveil more of her life. And having brought us to the brink again, Destiny's Child left the building. Do they belong at the top of the R&B girl-group ranks with the Supremes and TLC? Even with a small body of work, *#1's* answers with a tentative yes, though a more comprehensive collection with solo songs would be more persuasive. The lifespan of most girl groups is short and bittersweet. Beyoncé, Kelly and Michelle are wise to leave before being shown the door. Or brilliant enough to take a break before coming back with *Destiny Forever*.

DANYEL SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "Soldier," "Independent Women Part 1," "Say My Name"

Beyoncé graciously agrees to let Kelly stand in the middle this time.

rolled in. What the two lineups had in common—besides bassist Mike Rutherford, keyboardist Tony Banks and the rhythmically savvy Collins—was a gift for atmospheric suspense. A four-minute plea for love like "Tonight Tonight Tonight" and a surreal 24-minute extravaganza like "Supper's Ready" both slide something ominous under the hooks. This three-CD set runs chronologically backwards, so streamlined, brooding pop gives way to ambitious if dated epics. It's nearly all the Genesis anyone needs—and with that queasy undercurrent throughout, not as ridiculous as you might remember.
JON PARELES
DOWNLOAD: "That's All," "I Can't Dance," "The Cinema Show"

THE MOVE

MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTRY ✪✪✪

HARVEST/EMI

Eccentric rockers, beloved by Anglophiles, take their final bow

Dark-humored experimentalists with a knack for catchy singles (seven Top 10 U.K. hits from 1967 to 1972), the Move veered relentlessly from flowery psychedelic pop to heavy-duty rock. Though ignored in the U.S., their schizophrenic sound helped provide the architecture for everything from power pop (Cheap Trick) to shock rock (Alice Cooper). But by 1971, the Move were winding down, their focus divided between a fourth (and final) album and guitarists Jeff Lynne and Roy Wood's new project, Electric Light Orchestra. On *Message*, they sound distracted, bashing out boogie sludge, art rock and fruity vintage sendups without the devilish pixie dust that lifted previous records. The reissue bolsters 10 original tracks with nine additional ones, including the raucous "California Man" and the raw, original version of "Do Ya," finally a U.S. hit five years later when Lynne emerged as a radiowave mastermind.
ERIK HIMMELSBACH
DOWNLOAD: "Do Ya," "California Man"

NIRVANA

SLIVER: THE BEST OF THE BOX ✪✪

GEFFEN/UME

There are six great Nirvana records. This is not the seventh

KURT: STILL DEAD

There's no use speculating whether Kurt Cobain would have wanted his sketches, throwaways, pranks and duds entered into the public record; the dead don't get to speak for themselves, and suicides in particular renounce their right to self-representation. So this just-in-time-for-Christmas collection unashamedly summarizes last year's just-in-time-for-Christmas *With the Lights Out*, adding three demos withheld from the box. Unless you're thrilled by the moment when Cobain coughs in the 1985 gag "Spank Thru," these crusty discards add little to understanding his life or music. He was a genius, but he needed focus and motivation to balance his urge to be sloppy and offhand. And he needed Dave Grohl on drums. Here, he rarely has any of those. Judging from the cover art—a mess of cassettes with demos, riffs and "funny noises"—this could go on for years.
ROB TANNENBAUM
DOWNLOAD: "Oh the Guilt," "Blandest"

'N SYNC

GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪✪

JIVE

Keepsake from the ultimate champs of the '90s boy-band competition

Long ago and far away, serious young men regarded boy groups as a dire threat to their musical way of life. But that was before 9/11 and *American Idol* taught us first what a understood the importance of juxtaposing male and female vocals on the mic—which makes Ladybug the original Fergie.
TIM GRIERSON
DOWNLOAD: "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)," "La Femme Fetal," "Pacifics"

You haven't seen the last of ... oh.

BURIED TREASURE UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

DIGABLE PLANETS

REACHIN' (A NEW REFUTATION OF TIME AND SPACE) ✪✪✪✪

PENDULUM/ERG, 1993

This New York trio (recently reunited after a nine-year hiatus) mastered a jazzy hip-hop introspection that A Tribe Called Quest made famous and Kanye West surely must have studied. Socially conscious, they incorporated soulful samples and groovy atmosphere to create a headphone masterwork of urban sophistication. And way before the Black Eyed Peas thought of it, Digable Planets

DIGABLE PLANETS: ERNIE PANICCIOLI/RETNA LTD.; FOGERTY: NORMAN SEEFF

John Fogerty: All he needs is his guitar and his blow-dryer.

SWAMP THING

'60S ROCKER SHOWS JUST A SAMPLING OF HIS GREAT WORK

JOHN FOGERTY

THE LONG ROAD HOME ✪✪✪✪✪

FANTASY

AGING ARTISTS ALWAYS want to prove they haven't lost a step. Mortality is a bitch, and while some old-timers consciously manufacture product and/or repeat themselves, many squeeze that juice, trying just as hard in their maturity as they ever did when inspiration was on their side. In this struggle, John Fogerty enjoys major advantages. His minimalist, roots-rock aesthetic hasn't changed a whit since Creedence Clearwater Revival released five Top 10 albums in 1969 and 1970. His solo bands have all been better at Creedence than Creedence was. And his gravelly mid-range and spiritual high end retain considerable puissance.

So this return to Fantasy Records, which was sold off by nemesis Saul Zaentz just when Warner Bros. was noticing the red on Fogerty's balance sheet, is one of the rare career overviews with a shot at justifying itself, and it does. Spanning 36 years with its live 2005 versions of four chestnuts, it plays as one succession of timeless sure-shots. The decisive moment comes early, when the title track of Fogerty's last well-regarded album, 1985's *Centerfield*, leads easily from "Bad Moon Rising" to "Who'll Stop the Rain," two of his best-loved titles this side of "Proud Mary" (reserved as a closer, with a live "Fortunate Son" the encore). "Centerfield" is boyishly hopeful for a 39-year-old—the earlier songs surrounding it are much wearier. But its up mood adds an essential note to Fogerty's rock & roll purism.

With Creedence's ballroom-ready jams on "Susie-Q" and "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" omitted to make room for more originals, nothing essential (which doesn't mean nothing terrific) is missing. Fogerty is tough, compassionate, plain-spoken and to the point—11 tracks run under 2:45. Only nigglers will notice how non-rambunctious 1997's "Rambunctious Boy" is, or cringe at the toothlessness of 2004's antiwar "Déjà Vu (All Over Again)." Maybe he has lost a few steps. But he conceals it with the cunning of a man who has long made honesty his profession.
ROBERT CHRISTGAU
DOWNLOAD: "Fortunate Son," "Lookin' Out My Back Door"

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

RAY CHARLES

THE COMPLETE ATLANTIC RECORDINGS (1952–1959)

RHINO

Details the Genius's early years, as he invented a little genre called soul.

NEW YORK DOLLS

TOO MUCH TOO SOON

HIP-O SELECT/MERCURY

From NYC's cross-dressing glam kids, a 1974 trashterpiece whose title turned out to be all too true.

PUBLIC ENEMY

GREATEST HITS

DEF JAM/UME

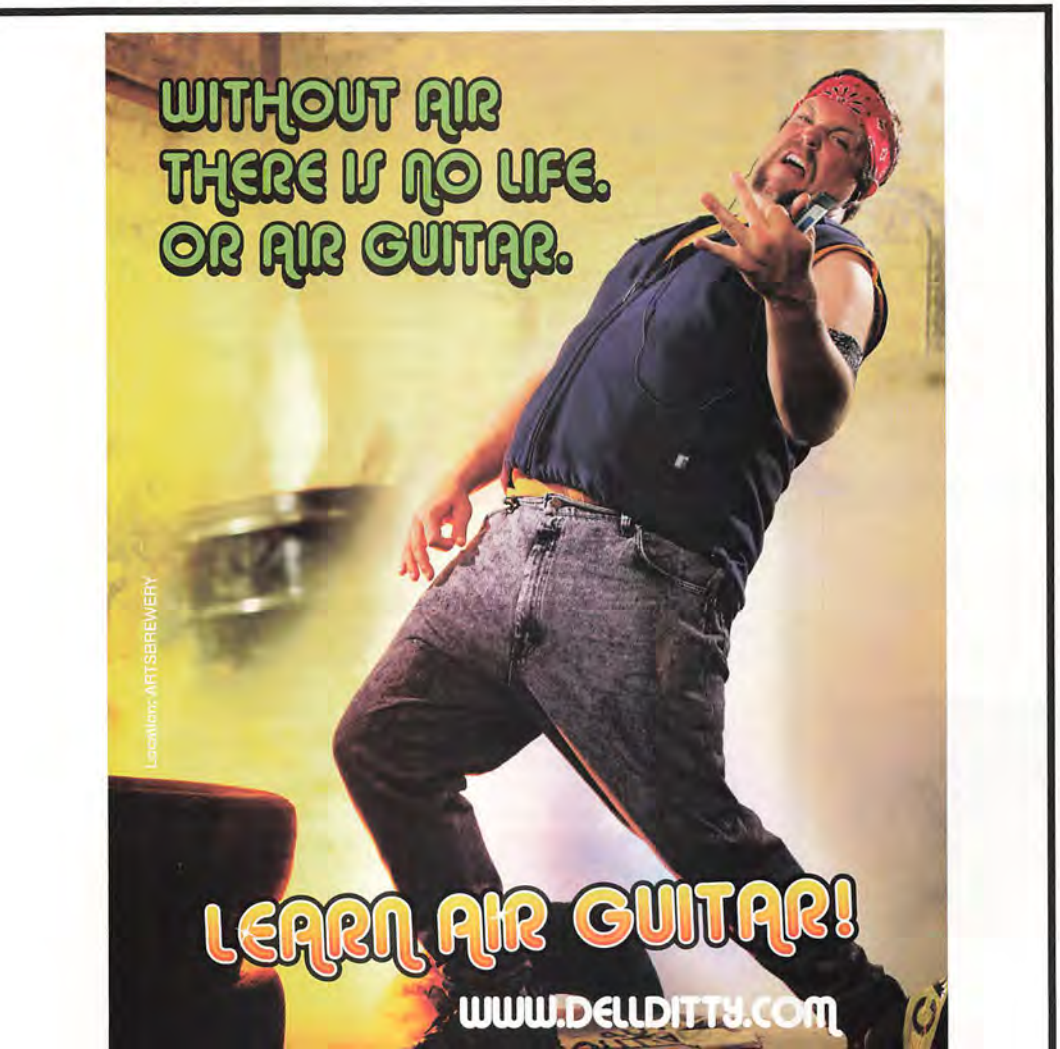
Sonic pioneers look back on 20 years of bringing the noise, fighting the power and bum-rushing the show.

RUN-D.M.C.

RAISING HELL

PROFILE/LEGACY/ARISTA

The best of four new reissues, it's the album that brought Kangols to MTV and hip-hop to the world.



threat was and then what crap was. This modest 12-song summation tops anything Boyz II Men could muster, and though it lacks a masterpiece to equal Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way," everyone this side of Nick Carter's mama knows that Justin Timberlake was a lead singer of vastly superior chops, emotional delicacy and wit. "I Want You Back," "It's Gonna Be Me" and "Bye Bye Bye" fire up prefab rhythm at its most efficient. And ballads that were once icky as inescapable objects of obsession are now kinda touching as artifacts.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "I Want You Back," "God Must Have Spent a Little More Time on You," "It's Gonna Be Me"

THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

RETROSPECTIVE 1963–1974 ✪✪✪

ABKCO RECORDS

Masterfully produced, exquisitely sung, a bit of a bore

Phil Spector's '60s wall-of-sound productions wouldn't have amounted to much without the voices that decorated them, and the

'N Sync loved "Freddie Mercury Dress-Up Night."

Righteous Brothers supplied some very fine wallpaper. Baritone Bill Medley and tenor Bobby Hatfield had the soulful delivery of Ray Charles without the storytelling ability; "Unchained Melody" is sentiment unadulterated by context, intimate yet vague, tailorable to sock-hop slow dances and *Ghost* star Patrick Swayze's rippling biceps. This anthology has undeniable high points—a remastered "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" is like a cleaned-up Sistine Chapel ceiling, full of newly uncovered bass notes and xylophone plings—but as a whole, the Brothers' oeuvre is strangely beside the point, like a film built around sidekicks. They ably croon "Ebb Tide" and heat up "Little Latin Lupe Lu," disappearing into their gorgeous backdrops instead of transcending them.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'"

PATTI SMITH

HORSES/HORSES ✪✪✪✪

LEGACY/COLUMBIA

Thirtieth anniversary of a rock landmark adds a rageful live CD

The first thing to love about Patti Smith's debut is the title. *Horses*—they're Freud's symbol for the sex drive, and every little girl wants a pony. From her total takeover of Them's '60s backdoor aria "Gloria" onward, Smith proved that a woman can own her sexuality, be phallic, trample you with her tongue and still

I LOVE THIS CD!

LAURA DERN
Actress, *Jurassic Park, Happy Endings*

JOHN PRINE
FAIR & SQUARE *OH BOY*

"He's an extraordinary songwriter: intelligent, human, witty in the way he describes the world. It is so refreshing and exciting."

'N SYNC: JIVE RECORDS; DERN: JASON MERRITT/FILMMAGIC.COM

Marc Bolan: Glam I am.

show her "feminine" side. At the dawn of punk rock, an all-male band wrote her revolution into the music's raggedy bones. Now Smith is punk's earth mama, in furious elder mode on 2005's live recreation of the album. "My generation had dreams, and we fucking created George Bush!" she bellows as the band goes ballistic. "The world is yours. Change it!" Regrets are for suckers, and Smith's still on the mount.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: "Birdland," "Free Money" (live), "My Generation" (live)

T. REX

THE SLIDER ✪✪✪✪✪

ZINC ALLOY AND THE HIDDEN RIDERS OF TOMORROW ✪✪✪

DANDY IN THE UNDERWORLD ✪✪

THE T. REX WAX. CO. SINGLES A'S AND B'S 1972–77 ✪✪

RHINO

The King of U.K. glitter rock on a slide toward boogie nowhereland

With feather boas and winking guitars, Marc Bolan of T. Rex created glam rock and made two genre masterpieces, but couldn't keep up with David Bowie. Mostly forgotten by the time of his 1977 death, Bolan left numerous basement tapes used to fashion bonus discs for these reissues. His bestseller at the time, 1972's *The Slider*, captured Bolan's band at its height, sputtering off swaggering ("Metal Guru") and sexy ("The Slider") bubblegum anthems so cannily produced they still throb. But T. Rextasy had run its course by 1974's *Zinc Alloy*. The British public ignored its American R&B flourishes, even after friend/rival Bowie scored with his similar "plastic soul" a year later. On Bolan's finale, *Dandy in the Underworld*, he awkwardly embraced the burgeoning punk movement, sounding all the more irrelevant. The chronological *Singles* depressingly traces his downward spiral.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD: "Metal Guru," "The Slider," "20th Century Boy"

BOLAN: COURTESY WARNER BROS. RECORDS

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

JERRY GARCIA

GARCIA PLAYS DYLAN ✪✪✪

RHINO

Garcia didn't so much play other people's songs as turn them inside-out, crafting fluid, multicolored guitar solos that make it easier to forgive his shabby crooning. These 15 previously unreleased live tracks —with and without the Grateful Dead—progress at a lumpy, old-timer pace, though "Tangled Up in Blue" breaks a sweat, barely.

JERRY LEE LEWIS

THE (COMPLETE) SESSION ✪✪✪

HIP-O SELECT/MERCURY

His glory days done, the piano-pounding nutcase tried to regain rock & roll credibility with a '73 London session, supported by Peter Frampton, Rory Gallagher and other fans. Lewis arrogantly tosses off a lazy program of rock oldies, including Chuck Berry's "Memphis," detouring for a bizarre yet strangely fascinating take on the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction."

MELANIE

PHOTOGRAPH: DOUBLE EXPOSURE ✪✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE/ATLANTIC

Melanie Safka's cat-in-heat yowl can obscure the considerable gifts that made her a precursor to Fiona Apple. On her 1976 album, the New York flower child unleashes aggressively confessional vignettes both wrenching ("Save Me") and tedious ("Groundhog Day"). A second disc of obscurities features the giggle-inspiring "Whamp Bhomp Song" and a touching "Over the Rainbow."

NINA SIMONE

THE SOUL OF NINA SIMONE ✪✪✪✪

LEGACY/RCA

Straddling jazz and pop, Simone projected somber Afrocentric authority, whether delivering a rambling, 10-minute "Porgy and Bess Medley" or celebrating the beauty in Dylan's "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues." Besides other '60s performances, this CD-DVD combo unearths spellbinding video, including 1969's pissed-off "Revolution."

SNOOP DOGG

THE BEST OF SNOOP DOGG ✪

PRIORITY/CAPITOL

When a best-of lacks the earliest (no "Gin & Juice") and latest (no "Drop It Like It's Hot") hits, beware of fraud. While the cheesy sequels "Gin & Juice II" and "Still a G Thang" reek of desperation, "Beautiful" provides an unusually sunny backdrop for Snoop's graceful rhyming.

BILL WITHERS

JUST AS I AM ✪✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Withers's near-perfect 1971 debut fuses introspective soul and smooth California pop, the better to showcase his quietly searing voice. The brooding hit "Ain't No Sunshine" stands out, but stunning cuts abound, among them the heart-breaking "I'm Her Daddy" and a restless version of "Everybody's Talkin'." The DVD side contains vintage TV appearances.

JIMI HENDRIX

THE DOOMED GUITAR KING RECORDS A CAREER'S WORTH OF ALBUMS IN FOUR YEARS BY ROBERT CHRISTGAU

EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

THERE'S NO DISCOGRAPHY in rock like Jimi Hendrix's, not because he died at 27 but because—unlike Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain, all also gone at 27—Hendrix was a true improviser. So in his case, the inevitable outtakes and concert tapes merit prolonged attention. Not counting inaudible R&B backings now finally suppressed by his estate, Hendrix's studio career began in October 1966 and ended when he asphyxiated on his own vomit in September 1970. While alive he generated three albums with the Jimi Hendrix Experience (Brits Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums) plus the live *Band of Gypsys* LP (African-Americans Billy Cox on bass and Buddy Miles on drums). That he left behind a much vaster body of important music reflects his enduring status as the greatest electric guitarist ever. How many versions of "Foxey Lady" do you need? Start deciding here.

To his horror, Jimi realizes his shoes clash with orange.

CLASSIC

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1967

★★★★★

Try to hear this bombshell debut as an English pop record—only two of the 11 skillfully paced tracks, three titanic bonus cuts and three fascinating B-sides run over four minutes, and hooks abound. You could hum these tunes. Yet humming definitely doesn't capture their essence, a roiling sea of guitar that would change how a generation of fans heard music and conceived their own blown minds.

Download: "Purple Haze," "Fire"

ELECTRIC LADYLAND

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1968

★★★★★

"It wasn't just slopped together; every little thing you hear there *means* something," said Hendrix of his two-LP masterwork, his final completed studio album. And though it isn't perfect, perfection wasn't the idea. No previous rock album had flowed like this, and while jazz albums often support as many contrasting sonic moods, Louis Armstrong himself didn't match Hendrix's appetite for sound effects and general silliness. His spaced-out spirituality is the fullest musicalization of "psychedelic" ever accomplished.

Download: "Crosstown Traffic," "1983 ... (A Merman I Should Turn to Be)"

VOODOO CHILD: THE JIMI HENDRIX COLLECTION

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/UNIVERSAL, 2001

★★★★★

This budget double—18 studio tracks balanced by 12 live recordings—whups the 20-track *Experience Hendrix: The Best of Jimi Hendrix*. Beyond "Manic Depression," it omits no essential songs. Several arrive in uncanonical live versions, but you can't comprehend Hendrix without some of those. Despite climaxing with "Wild Thing" at Monterey rather than leading with it, disc 2 stands as his best live album.

Download: "All Along the Watchtower," "Johnny B. Goode"

GREAT

BLUES

MCA, 1994

★★★★

"That sound was really—not evil, just a thick sound," Hendrix said of the Muddy Waters and Elmore James records he heard at his dad's parties. Though it's reductionist to define Hendrix as a bluesman just because he was black, he melded Chicago blues and country blues and interplanetary blues and bent blues like a supernatural. His sound was even thicker than mentor Albert King's, yet it could get as fanciful as prime Skip James.

Download: "Hear My Train a-Comin'" (electric), "Red House"

BBC SESSIONS

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1998

★★★★

Seattle native Hendrix was already a veteran of the R&B circuit when ex-Animal Chas Chandler brought him to England and gave him a group. Instant sensations in London, the Experience were regular guests at the BBC, where they got to work out material under better-than-live recording conditions. There's dross and duplication here, but the sound is thinner on Rykodisc's more judicious 1988 *Radio One*, and all three versions of the jamming "Driving South" belong.

Download: "Driving South" (disc 1, track 7), "Hound Dog"

LIVE AT WINTERLAND

RYKODISC, 1987

★★★★

It's been eclipsed sonically (*Berkeley*) and conceptually (*Woodstock*). But this pioneering digitalization, piecing together songs from three San Francisco nights in October 1968 to simulate one uninterrupted concert, redefined posthumous Hendrix and remains a surpassingly realistic live keepsake.

Download: "Manic Depression," "Wild Thing"

DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD.

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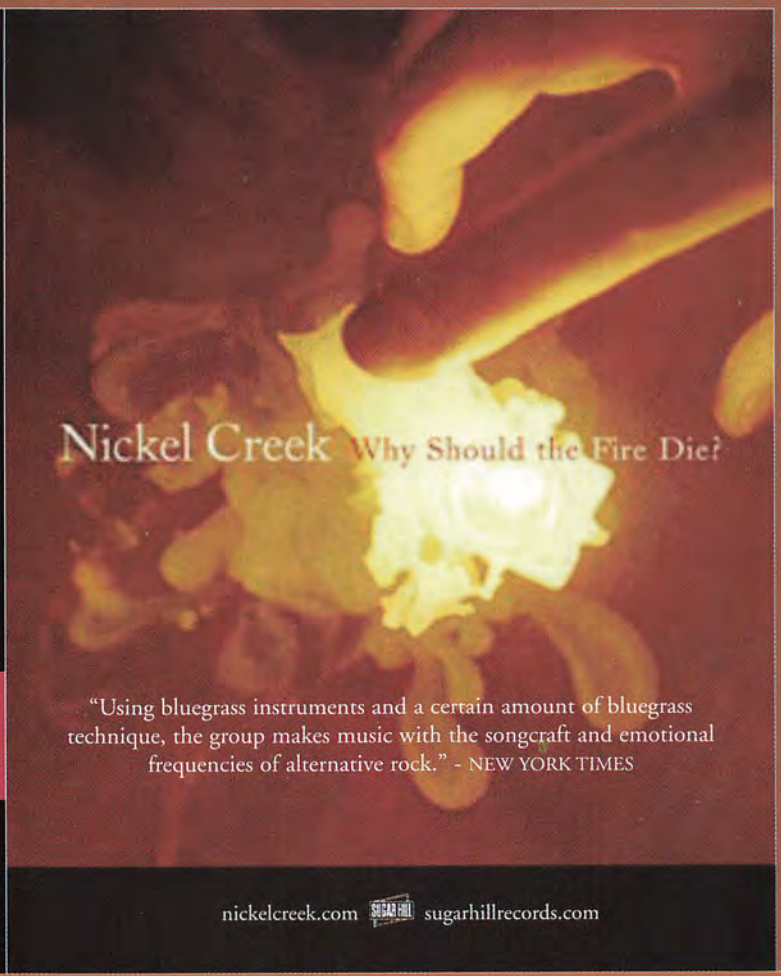

"Using bluegrass instruments and a certain amount of bluegrass technique, the group makes music with the songcraft and emotional frequencies of alternative rock." - NEW YORK TIMES

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENTS

A GUIDE TO WHO ELSE IS MAKING MUSIC...

25 TOP SELLING INDIE ARTISTS OF 2005

- A Band of Bees (Astralwerks)
- Aimee Mann (SuperEgo)
- Art Brut (Fierce Panda)
- Belle and Sebastian (Matador)
- Black Dice (Astralwerks)
- Bright Eyes (Saddle Creek)
- Broken Social Scene (Arts and Crafts)
- Interpol (Matador)
- Iron and Wine (Overcoat)
- Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz (BME/TVT)
- M.I.A. (XL Recordings)
- Motion City Soundtrack (Epitaph)
- Sleater Kinney (SubPop)
- Spoon (Merge)
- Stars (Arts and Crafts)
- Sufjan Stevens (Asthmatic Kitty)
- The Arcade Fire (Merge)
- The Go Betweens (Yep Roc)
- The Hold Steady (Frenchkiss)
- The Mountain Goats (4AD)
- The New Pornographers (SubPop)
- The Ponys (In the Red)
- The Postal Service (SubPop)
- The Shins (SubPop)
- Wolf Parade (SubPop)

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THE PLATFORM GROUP

GOOD

WOODSTOCK
MCA, 1994
✪✪✪✪

Hendrix's Woodstock performance with the under-rehearsed Gypsy Sun and Rainbows band wasn't his greatest, but its aura is enhanced by this condensed reconfiguration—deleted in favor of the real-time, war-horse-laden *Live at Woodstock* once the Hendrix family gained control of its favorite son's catalogue.
Download: "Star Spangled Banner," "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)/Stepping Stone"

FIRST RAYS OF THE NEW RISING SUN
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1997
✪✪✪✪

"If you give deeper thoughts in your music, then the masses will buy them," Hendrix said, and if he'd finished this double LP his dreams might have come true. But as reimagined by longtime engineer-collaborator Eddie Kramer, it's less startling musically than *Electric Ladyland* and not too profound lyrically. It's also a powerful collection by a genius whose songwriting kept growing and whose solos rarely disappoint. Alternative: Polydor Russia's *The Cry of Love/War Heroes* combines two early-'70s posthumouses.
Download: "Angel," "Belly Button Window"

LIVE AT BERKELEY
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/UNIVERSAL, 2003
✪✪✪

Hendrix's last band was his best. Holdover drummer Mitchell understood both his straight-ahead momentum and his taste for adventure, and army buddy Billy Cox's bass grounded the music rhythmically as Noel Redding could not. This well-recorded live disc documents a full set from May 1970, with Hendrix energized by the easing of the tour grind manager Michael Jeffery had long imposed.
Download: "Hey Baby (New Rising Sun)," "I Don't Live Today"

BE CAREFUL

AXIS: BOLD AS LOVE
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1968
✪✪✪

True believers praise the spaced-out lightness of his second album, released just half a year after *Are You Experienced?* But since Hendrix immediately heavied up again, figure they're kidding themselves—half the songs are forgettable as songs if fine as recordings, and there's even some pro forma guitar. Not much, though, and to hear Mitchell going wild on tracks even briefer than the debut's is to nudge Keith Moon over on his freestyle drumming pedestal.
Download: "Little Wing," "If 6 Was 9"

SOUTH SATURN DELTA
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/MCA, 1997
✪✪✪

Discographically presumptuous though this melange of odd tracks, alternate takes and previously unreleased songs is, it establishes the listenability of Hendrix's dribs and drabs. Crazies with time on their hands and somebody else's credit card can have a not dissimilar experience with the four-CD *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* box.
Download: "Message to the Universe (Message to Love)," "Pali Gap"

BAND OF GYPSYS
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/CAPITOL, 1970
✪✪

The now deleted *Band of Gypsys 2*, unveiled early in the CD era, was preferable to this over-rated 46-minute concert LP, laid down New Year's Eve 1969 with the solid-to-stolid Cox-Miles rhythm section. The project was a ploy if not quite a scam, conceived to satisfy a legal judgment that required Hendrix to give Capitol an album on the basis of a commitment incurred working with R&B journeyman Curtis Knight. The world's greatest guitarist sure leans on the wah-wah here.
Download: "Machine Gun"

FOR FANS ONLY

BLUE WILD ANGEL: JIMI HENDRIX LIVE AT THE ISLE OF WIGHT
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/UNIVERSAL, 2004
✪✪

Three weeks before his accidental death, Hendrix headlined at a notoriously ill-starred festival, where his set was weary and dispirited. It wasn't terrible, as the two CDs and DVD-with-interview-exposition make clearer than necessary. But there are many better ways to spend 40 bucks.
Download: "Foxey Lady"

LIVE AT THE OAKLAND COLISEUM
DAGGER/EXPERIENCE HENDRIX, 1998
✪✪

This competent unauthorized mono recording of an April 1969 concert has now been certified by Experience Hendrix's major-domo, Jimi's step-sister Janie Hendrix, whom he barely knew. It's a bootleg, it sounds like one and it's expressly "not intended for the casual fan." Big deals: 18-minute workout on "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" and, heart be still, a guest shot by Jefferson Airplane's Jack Casady.
Download: "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)"

POWER OF SOUL: A TRIBUTE TO JIMI HENDRIX
IMAGE, 2004
✪

In which aging stars and young souls try to prove that Hendrix's compositions, as opposed to performances, will earn royalties forever. Songwriting wasn't Hendrix's strength, but don't blame him for this—he was too busy reinventing the guitar to anticipate the tribute album. The two best tracks are by people who were as dead as he was when it came out, and the main thing it proves is that Hendrix's guitar isn't inimitable, just unduplicatable.
Download: John Lee Hooker, "Red House"; Stevie Ray Vaughan, "Little Wing/Third Stone From the Sun"

FURTHER READING

ROOM FULL OF MIRRORS: A BIOGRAPHY OF JIMI HENDRIX
BY CHARLES R. CROSS
HYPERION, 2005
✪✪✪✪

Impressively researched by the Seattle-based Kurt Cobain biographer, this is the definitive life story at only 367 pages. Never starry-eyed, and superb on Hendrix's impoverished youth and lawsuit-ridden postlife.

'SCUSE ME WHILE I KISS THE SKY: THE LIFE OF JIMI HENDRIX
BY DAVID HENDERSON
DOUBLEDAY, 1981
✪✪✪✪

The first major Hendrix bio misses facts and takes liberties, many interior monologues among them. But poet Henderson has the imagination, insight and way with words to leave a vivid and convincing impression.

CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC: JIMI HENDRIX AND THE ROCK 'N' ROLL REVOLUTION
BY CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY
ST. MARTIN'S, 1989
✪✪✪✪

Criticism first, cultural history second and as biographical as it needs to be, this argues undeniably that supposed bluesman Hendrix owed R&B rhythm guitarists big-time, and has the gall to scrutinize his sexual politics.

Gerard Way models the 50 Cent evening-wear collection.

Ray Toro's hair auditions for the Mars Volta.

GHOUL OF ROCK

NEW JERSEY VAMPIRES DROP F-BOMBS, LEAVE FANS IN ECSTASY AND MASCARA

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

SOMA
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

★★★★

AS THE SUN starts to set tonight over sunny, surfy, blonde San Diego, a spooky thing happens: Vampires emerge from SUVs and broken-down sedans in the parking lot of a ratty strip just a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. They're pierced, tatted and sullen, lacquered with black makeup and ornamented with red neckties. It's like an open casting call for a slasher film as directed by Wong Kar-Wai: something equal parts stylish and sick, groovy and gory.

The costumes are a tribute to My Chemical Romance, the proudly Jersey-born quintet who—in one of the year's biggest surprises—crashed MTV with a twisted, death-and-comic-book-obsessed brand of theatrical screamo. In this windowless box filled with rows of disaffected teens staring eagerly at the low stage, desperate for spectacle, My Chemical Romance do not stint. They've succeeded by returning adolescent drama and pageantry to rock.

They take the stage to the sound of church organs, with stained glass windows projecting from two movie screens that bracket the band. Frontman Gerard Way is a self-made superhero (not unlike, say, Batman). Offstage he's cherubic and totally *Joisey*. Tonight, in black with a bulletproof vest wrapped around a businessman's tie, he's a snarling, screaming, middle-finger-raising animal.

"Welcome to the new church, motherfuckers!" he bellows before the band—led by its secret weapon, the afroed, metal-soloing guitarist Ray Toro—tear into the adrenalizing "Thank You for the Venom" and "Cemetery Drive" off their million-selling second album, *Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge*. These songs cut and paste the gloom and doom of old-school ghouls like Danzig with the self-flagellating whimsy of Morrissey; for kids raised on emo, a little bit of fake blood beats crocodile tears any day.

After commanding the wildly pogoing San Diego audience to shout "Hi, Grandma!," Way leads the band into "Helena," MCR's unlikely breakout death-jam that doubles as a tribute to his (and bassist brother Mikey's) late grandmother.

On the video screens, abstract shapes bleed into black-and-white war footage as Gerard—who clearly picked up some crowd-manipulating moves from Billie Joe Armstrong while opening for Green Day this year—dips into his band's lesser-known first album. After a full year of touring, even the old songs sound too gloriously huge for such a dingy space. "The most important thing I learned from Billie Joe is confidence," Way later tells *Blender*. "I'm just a typical punk-rock kid terrified of success and fame, and he told me there's nothing wrong with being a rock star if you use it to inspire people."

Though a cursing thesaurus might be a worthy Christmas gift for Way (he drops more F-bombs than Eddie Murphy circa *Raw*), he is capable of inspiring the vam-

ZACH CORDNER (2)

pires, as when he rails against suicide: "If you are depressed or suicidal you need to find help and someone to talk to! Don't piss your life away! Now: Are you ready to dance?"

After a stirring version of "The Ghost of You" (2005's slowdance of choice for the goth at heart) and the debut of a new song (a stadium-ready hyperballad called "Shut Up and Play," which hints at a new, Meat-Loaf-on-Warped-Tour direction), MCR vanish to a roomful of screams. But every good superhero deserves a sequel, and soon Way re-emerges from the wings, his pancake face-paint streaked with sweat. The last two songs get the biggest ovations: the howling "Vampires Will Never Hurt You" and, finally, the snotty buzzsaw of "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)." The band exits with a shout of "*Merci*, motherfuckers!" and a burst of confetti. "The real point of this tour is a celebration," Way tells *Blender*. Rarely has a band so obsessed with death sounded so alive.

ANDY GREENWALD

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

"I always dress up when I see MCR—their style is really good! I've tried to get a bulletproof vest but they're really expensive. Tonight I was in the craziest mosh pit of all. Girls were passing out everywhere!"

HENRY ENRIQUEZ, 17, STUDENT
EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA

"It was awesome, but they played 'Helena' too early! It should have been either first or last. Also, they must sweat a lot in those bulletproof vests!"

CAT MAGUIRE, 17, STUDENT
CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

"Gerard has great presence and gets the crowd involved. He could use some more creative ways of cursing, though, like maybe 'shitballs' or 'fucktastic.'"

SPIKE LODGE, 21, PIZZA DELIVERY
REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

BOTTOM: ANDY GREENWALD (3)

Dave Chappelle: "There's about this much chance I'll ever do a third season."

THE RACE CARD

COMEDY'S MOST UNPREDICTABLE STAR JOKES ABOUT CRYSTAL METH, GEORGE BUSH AND HIS OWN DISAPPEARANCE

DAVE CHAPPELLE

RUPP ARENA
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

OCTOBER 1, 2005

✪✪✪✪

"HECKLING WILL *NOT* be tolerated and all hecklers will be removed from the show without refund," warns a series of notices outside Rupp Arena, which seems like an unfriendly way to start an evening of titty jokes. But it's not just any heckling Dave Chappelle wants to snuff—it's heckling that involves the words "I'm Rick James, bitch!" If he proved anything when he walked away from the third season of *Chappelle's Show*, his provocative Comedy Central series, it's his determination to not build a career off a catchphrase. It's almost as if Rick James had decided he was tired of singing "Super Freak."

This is only Chappelle's seventh show since April, when he took an unplanned "spiritual retreat" to South Africa in order to escape the stress of his series. If anything, his crisis has made him an even bigger hero. A preppy, proper crowd of 6,700, many on dates and about 90% white, are laughing even as they file into the sold-out arena. "I don't know if you read it in the paper, but I'm fucking crazy. Out of my *mind*," Chappelle starts, after taking the stage to Mike Jones's "Still Tippin'." Throughout the 60-minute set, he assumes an indignant tone, damning "the media" and specifically *Newsweek*, which hinted that he abandoned his show because he was "partying" too much. "I hate them motherfuckers," he says. "I hate their guts."

Some of Chappelle's bits are so old they need hip-replacement surgery: Even Jay Leno isn't doing Bill Clinton sex jokes anymore. A riff on marriage and masturbation ("I'm world-famous, and I'm like a fuckin' jerk-off ninja, hiding in the shadows of my own home") draws roars and groans, but Chris Rock covered the same topic six years ago in *Bigger & Blacker*.

"I'm going through a little immature streak," Chappelle declares, lighting a cigarette: There are jokes about anal sex, and who in the audience has herpes, and gynecologists who talk dirty, and sex with elderly women, and many uses of his signature word, "titties." At 32, he's got the cheeky delivery of a naughty school kid, and with a quick volley of derision he shuts down the first heckler who shouts Rick James's name. ("Uh oh, here we go.")

But he can also cut through current events like no other comic by finding the racial subtexts. "America's spending like MC Hammer," he clucks. He anticipates a 2008 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice: "You know who's gonna win that shit? Ralph Nader, by a landslide." And he praises Kanye West, who declared this summer that George Bush was indifferent to blacks: "I'm proud of Kanye. And I'm gonna miss him so much." There are also recurring references to whites who use the word "nigger," including crystal meth addicts and Pres. Bush (behind Colin Powell's back).

Titty jokes keep crowds happy (and Chappelle, too), but it's his flair with race, our country's favorite unspeakable topic, that makes him a great and daring comic. That's why he knows he can do without Rick James: He's got a lot more hits ahead of him.

ROB TANNENBAUM

Worst. Bachelor party. *Ever.*

THE BI WHO LOVED ME

THE RECENTLY DEPOSED 007 GETS THE LAST WORD WITH A SEEDY, REVISIONIST RIFF ON THE ESPIONAGE GENRE BY CLARK COLLIS

THE MATADOR

DIRECTED BY Richard Shepard

STARRING Pierce Brosnan, Greg Kinnear, Hope Davis, Philip Baker Hall

THERE IS A decidedly odd moment early in *The Matador* when the film's smarmy lead character muses that there are two things that always taste better in Mexico: "Margaritas ... and cock!"

As jarring as the words themselves is the fact that they are spoken by Pierce Brosnan, the perennially suave actor who gained international film-star status mouthing the PG-rated double entendres—as opposed to genitally specific single ones—of James Bond. Triply weird is that, despite boasting the ratty moustache and zip-up boots of a cheap pimp, Brosnan's booze-guzzling, sexually voracious, continent-hopping assassin Julian Noble is a very 007-ish figure. Certainly, the technical lack of a license to kill doesn't stop him from doing a great deal of it in this genre-tweaking comedy-drama.

"It definitely is like the very worst day of James Bond's life," explains *The Matador*'s writer-director, Richard Shepard. "I was really lucky that Pierce said, 'All right, I'm gonna allow you to possibly destroy my career.'"

The hitman—or, as the ironically named Noble prefers, "fatality facilitator"—is at the end of his guilt-racked tether, seemingly incapable of a real relationship until he finds himself bonding (sorry) with Greg Kinnear's average-joe businessman over hotel bar drinks. It is that tenuous connection around which the film hinges, as Brosnan first attempts to get his new friend to help him on a job and then, months later, turns up at the suburban Denver home Kinnear shares with wife Hope Davis for reasons unknown and, given the film's house-of-mirrors plotting, unguessable.

It's easy to see why the role appealed to Brosnan, who, prior to being relieved of 007's tux last year, had long agitated for the franchise to loosen its profitable but formulaic creative straitjacket. Given this—as well as the actor's own description of *The Matador* as "a farewell to that chapter in time"—it is easy to view the film, which his own company produced, as an attempt to show what could have been in the Bond universe.

And what could have been proves to be a lot of fun. We first

"To-ga! to-ga!"

FOUR NON-BONDS

NOT ALL ATTEMPTS TO TINKER WITH THE 007 FORMULA HAVE BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS ***THE MATADOR***

IN LIKE FLYNT (1967)
A pre-PC James Coburn defends the world from a cabal of female villains with his secret weapon: misogyny!

REMO WILLIAMS: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS ... (1985)
... and ends. Joel Grey playing a Korean mentor to gruff cop Fred Ward? How did this not work?

THE SAINT (1997)
Val Kilmer is superthief and Bond rip-off Simon Templar in unholy instant franchise-aborter.

SPY KIDS 3-D: GAME OVER (2003)
Underage scamps have the technology to defeat villain Sly Stallone—but not 3-D-induced migraines.

TOP: DANIEL DAZA; BOTTOM: 20TH CENTURY FOX/THE KOBAL COLLECTION

encounter Brosnan waking in a Mexico City hotel room next to a naked beautiful woman—so far, so Bond. Rather less superspy-ish is the fact that Brosnan next decorates his toes with the lime-green nail varnish of said beauty, just one of many ladies of the night he will engage during the course of the film. Although it's not just *ladies* of the night that Brosnan's Noble is carnally interested in.

"Pierce is definitely playing a trisexual," chuckles Shepard. "The character will try anything because he's lapsed into this moral vacuum."

At the time the 40-year-old Shepard wrote *The Matador*, he was recovering from a long spell in "movie jail," penance for having directed 1992's David Bowie–starring *The Linguini Incident*, a box-office bomb he now describes as "a disaster on every level." Shepard originally intended *The Matador* to be made for $250,000 with unknown New York stage actors before Brosnan expressed an interest in playing the lead.

"I truly thought that no mainstream actor would say 'margaritas and cock,'" says Shepard, who with Brosnan on board was able to secure a $10 million budget. "And I didn't even think about Pierce at all, although in the original script there was a line where Greg Kinnear's character says to him, 'What are you? James Bond?'"

The end product, far from destroying Brosnan's reputation, may well be the making of his post-Bond career as the actor rearranges his signature role's DNA without ever falling into parody. Moreover, regardless of who replaces him as 007, it's difficult to imagine the next Bond movie being as stylish or well-written as this.

"I'm happy that this movie works on its own terms, but it's working on another level as well," admits Shepard. "Pierce is truly saying goodbye to a character in a very funny way. I mean, there's one scene where he's fucking this woman and a dog is humping his leg! But he never said, 'I don't want to do this.' It was more like, 'What's the line between funny and debased?'"

WALK THE LINE: SUZANNE TENNER; GET RICH: COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES; ENDICOTT: FRANK MULLEN/WIREIMAGE.COM; ICE HARVEST: CHUCK HODES; SYRIANA: GLEN WILSON; AEON FLUX: JASIN BOLAND; HARRY POTTER: MURRAY CLOSE; NARNIA: PHIL BRAY; WOLF CREEK: DANIEL GUERRA AND DIMENSION FILMS; IN THE MIX: SAEED ADYANI; BEE SEASON: PHIL BRAY

BLENDER APPROVED

The best movies of the past months

WALK THE LINE
Joaquin Phoenix channels Johnny Cash in gritty music biopic. Yee-haw!

GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'
50 Cent channels 50 Cent in gritty music biopic. Word!

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

SAM ENDICOTT
SINGER, THE BRAVERY

"*Me and You and Everyone We Know*. It's so funny, in a realistic and creative way. A couple of the guys in the band hated it, and we got in a fight. It got physical."

THE EXCITED-O-METER

THIS MONTH'S NEW RELEASES, RANKED ACCORDING TO OUR HIGHLY SCIENTIFIC METHOD OF GUESSING

VERY EXCITED

THE ICE HARVEST
When John Cusack and Billy Bob Thornton steal money from the mob, what could possibly go wrong? Only everything! But hilariously, given the involvement of Harold Ramis, director of *Caddyshack* and, uh, *Bedazzled*.

SYRIANA
A porked-up George Clooney stars as real-life CIA spook Robert Baer in a film that does for the oil industry what writer-director Stephen Gaghan's *Traffic* script did for the drug trade. Which is to say, makes it really complicated.

AEON FLUX
In the 25th century, the remnants of humanity live idyllically in a walled city. But is catsuit-clad terrorist Charlize Theron happy? No—so let the ass-kicking begin in this version of MTV's early-'90s animated extravaganza.

EXCITED-ISH

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE
Dark times lie ahead for our hero in this fourth Potter movie. But whether that refers to competing in the Tri-wizard Tournament or learning what his *other* magic wand is for, we can't say.

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE
Having kids believe lions are adorable talking Christ-like figures is a small price to pay for this adaptation of C.S. Lewis's book about magic furniture.

WOLF CREEK
After the car of three young vacationing pals breaks down in the middle of the Australian desert, help is at hand in the form of a seemingly friendly bushman. And by "help" we of course mean gore-drenched, serial-killer mayhem.

NOT SO MUCH

IN THE MIX
When Usher falls in love with the daughter of mob boss Chazz Palminteri … hey, what is this? Mess With the Mob Month? They're not called "the mob" because they're so damn loveable, you know!

BEE SEASON
Hand on heart, we can't *swear* this isn't going to be the season's must-see big-screen thrill ride. But we *can* say it involves Richard Gere and hinges on his daughter's attempt to become a spelling-bee champ.

From where *we're* sitting, this setup actually looks pretty sweet.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

FROM BOX-OFFICE BOMB TO OFT-QUOTED CULT CLASSIC, THE MOVIE THAT INSPIRED A MILLION WORKPLACE REVENGE FANTASIES GETS THE DELUXE TREATMENT BY CLARK COLLIS

OFFICE SPACE: SPECIAL EDITION

20TH CENTURY FOX

✪✪✪✪

"MIKE JUDGE HAS 'Fuck you' money," says actor Ron Livingston of his *Office Space* director on this DVD's making-of doc. "When they say, 'You have to change that,' he has the ability to say, 'Fuck you.'"

Unfortunately, Judge's fortune—accrued from creating *Beavis and Butt-head* and *King of the Hill*—got him only so far. Judge hated the *Office Space* poster, its tagline ("Work Sucks") and even the film itself, which subsequently tanked at the box office before establishing itself as one of the best-selling DVDs of all time.

Alas, none of these travails are examined in the documentary, although with the exception of Jennifer Aniston, all the principals are interviewed, including Judge, Livingston and Gary Cole, unforgettable as the odious boss, Lumbergh. But the deleted scenes are the big-ticket items here, with one alluding to the previously unsuspected death of a central character, while another suggests the happy ending granted Livingston's character may not be that happy after all.

The film itself remains a work of superbly cast comic genius. Livingston in particular is perfect as a white-collar drone whose post-hypnotherapy revolt against corporate culture inspires innumerable laugh-out-loud moments, not least his Geto Boys–soundtracked gutting of a fish on Lumbergh's beloved "TPS reports," whatever the hell they are. The real shock, watching the film again, is how angry it is—pretty much everyone seems close to snapping and, as fans will know, the baseball bat-assisted destruction of a hated fax machine is just the beginning of the mayhem that commences when they finally do. All in all, it comes as no surprise to hear Livingston's assertion on the documentary that the film running through his character's head is not *Office Space* at all but 1999's other flop-turned-cultural-phenomenon: *Fight Club*.

DIRECTOR'S CUT

MIKE JUDGE CAN FINALLY LAUGH ABOUT *OFFICE SPACE* ... SORTA

DO YOU REALLY HAVE "FUCK YOU" MONEY?
That's the *King of the Hill* syndication money. As we were shooting *Office Space*, my manager was always sitting there with his cell-phone negotiating the deal, going, "Do you know what these points are going to be *worth*?" So I was getting more "fuck you" as the production went on.

DID YOU EVER WORK A CUBICLE JOB?
Yeah, I had an engineering job for a military contractor, working on F-18 stuff. It wasn't like I thought I deserved better. And that's even sadder. I thought, this is what I deserve, and I can't stand it and I'm going to be here until I retire.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE TO BE A GOOD BOSS BECAUSE OF THE MOVIE?
That has come up from time to time. I'm kind of passive-aggressive. I would actually prefer to be one of the bosses of the '50s, when it was just, "Hey, Milton, move your desk," rather than, "Hi, what's happening?" Trying to be cool and be a boss at the same time—that's what I always hated.

DOES THE "TPS" IN TPS REPORT STAND FOR ANYTHING?
It was from when I was working for the military contractor, but I think it's okay for me to say now: Test Program Sets.

WE GOT THE SCOOP! SAY, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT JENNIFER ANISTON?
I guess she just faded into obscurity.

CLARK COLLIS

WAR OF THE WORLDS

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Essentially a snail's-eye-view of the apocalypse, Tom Cruise stars in this Spielberg-helmed remake as a not-very-good dad who doesn't do much, or anything at all really, to stop a horde of tripod-driving ETs from blowing New Jersey to smithereens. Sadly, after a bang-up first hour, matters grind to a halt when our hero hunkers down in a cellar with Tim Robbins, leaving audiences to ponder not humanity's frailty but just how many yards taller than his co-star Robbins actually is.

MR. & MRS. SMITH

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

Despite being one of the world's most proficient assassins, Brad Pitt doesn't have the brains to realize that wife Angelina Jolie is *also* one of the world's most proficient assassins in Doug Liman's tabloid-enthralling but actually dull thriller. Vince Vaughn, playing Pitt's still-living-with-his-mom pal, is the best thing about the whole film, although these days that goes without saying.

HOUSE OF WAX

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪

Gruesome but unremarkable horror remake in which the usual bunch of let's-split-up idiots are turned to wax sculptures by a pair of psychotic twins. Paris Hilton isn't one of the people who get the Madame Tussaud treatment, although given her limited acting skills, she might as well be. Lest anyone forget why she was cast in the first place, however, director Jaume Collet-Serra relentlessly has characters photograph her through a video camera to remind us of La Hilton's (much more convincing) turn in *One Night in Paris*.

AIRPLANE: "DON'T CALL ME SHIRLEY" EDITION

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪✪

Of course, they could have called it the "Do You Like Movies About Gladiators?" Edition. Or the "We Have Clearance, Clarence" Edition. Or the "Looks Like I Picked the Wrong Week to Stop Drinking/Smoking/Sniffing Glue" Edition. This re-release of the preeminent genre spoof—'70s disaster flicks get the skewer here—features deleted scenes and commentary from the Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker team of writer-directors.

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT (2)

Not pictured: Radioactive Man.

MOVING PICTURES

THIS MONTH, ILLINOIS POP-PUNKSTERS **FALL OUT BOY** REVEAL WHAT DVDS THEY WATCH TO ALLEVIATE TOUR-BUS TEDIUM

"We are the nerdiest people you'll ever meet, so we'll sometimes watch the whole *Star Wars* collection—all *six*, back to back. We also watch *Thundercats* because we used to have crushes on the girl Thundercat, Cheetara. Recently we've been enjoying a bootleg version of *Flightplan*. It's hilarious because the picture's too wide for the screen—Jodie Foster's head is *huge*."

DARK WATER

BUENA VISTA HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

A tale of ghostly ceiling dampness, this Jennifer Connelly thriller oozes almost as much class as it does, well, ooze. Actually, it has too *much* class, with *Motorcycle Diaries* director Walter Salles seemingly determined to make not a horror film at all but a melancholic meditation on motherhood. Those who like more in-your-face scares should check out the recently released Japanese original instead.

THE ISLAND

DREAMWORKS

✪✪

Given its sub-A-list cast and lack of nuptials-crashing or chocolate factories, no one should have been surprised at *The Island*'s catastrophic box-office tanking last summer. But in fact, this explosion-heavy tale of on-the-lam clones Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson could have been a pretty entertaining way to spend 90 minutes. So why director Michael Bay decided to make it an hour longer than that is a mystery. Those wishing to extend the experience will find a behind-the-scenes featurette and Bay commentary.

STAR WARS: EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH

20TH CENTURY FOX

✪✪✪

Every relationship, even one as dysfunctional as that between the *Star Wars* franchise and males of a certain age, demands closure. And though the turgid CGI-orgy that is the prequel trilogy failed to capture hearts and minds the way the original *Star Wars* movies did—what could?—the opportunity to see whiny Hayden Christensen turn into asthmatic baddie Darth Vader managed to deliver on advance buzz that this sixth, er, "third" chapter was slightly less shitty than its two predecessors, thanks mainly to a crackling, blessedly exposition-free final half-hour. Packed with behind-the-scenes ephemera, consider this a fond-ish farewell to a cultural touchstone that overstayed its welcome.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST DVDs FROM THE PAST MONTHS

THE BIG LEBOWSKI

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

Bowling, Jeff Bridges, White Russians, peed-on rugs, severed toes, "Shut the fuck up, Donny!" *et al.*

BATMAN BEGINS

WARNER HOME VIDEO

Christian Bale dons the bat cowl for best blockbuster of the year—and greatest Batman movie ever.

FALL OUT BOY: KEN SCHLES; LEBOWSKI: UNIVERSAL; BATMAN: DAVID JAMES

MUSIC DUDs

Billie Joe eyes pyro possibilities for the next tour.

GREEN MONSTER

AMERICAN IDIOTS CLOSE THE BOOK ON THE OPUS THAT PROPELLED THEM FROM POP-PUNK ELDER STATESMEN TO RABBLE-ROUSING JUGGERNAUT WITH A SUITABLY BOMBASTIC LIVE DVD BY JOSH EELLS

GREEN DAY: BULLET IN A BIBLE

REPRISE

✪✪✪✪

"This is the biggest gig pretty much in the history of punk rock," marvels Green Day frontman Billie Joe Armstrong in this eye-popping concert flick, and—in terms of scale, at least—it's tough to disagree. Filmed over two sold-out nights this past June at England's Milton Keynes National Bowl, *Bullet* shows the band transforming their chart-topping rock opera, *American Idiot*, into a full-on spectacle, complete with aerial helicopter shots, sky-rocketing fireworks, six-foot jets of flame and 130,000 screaming Brits.

But director Samuel Bayer, who also shot all the videos for *Idiot*, also includes plenty of behind-the-scenes footage, ranging from the goofy (bassist Mike Dirnt doing his Karen O impersonation) to the really goofy (drummer Tré Cool quoting *Cool Hand Luke* while dressed like a Canadian Mountie). It's a refreshing reminder that before they became the sloganeering standard-bearers of leftie rock, Green Day were just three whiny Berkeley punks who liked to sing about whacking off.

THE BEST OF THE REST

GUIDED BY VOICES: THE ELECTRIFYING CONCLUSION
(PLEXIFILM)
✪✪✪✪
After 20 years, 1,057 personnel changes*, 1,248,354 songs* and one final boozy four-hour marathon, Bob Pollard and his iron-livered crew hang 'em up in Chicago on New Year's Eve 2004. This deluxe package contains every slurred second of it. [*Numbers may be exaggerated for dramatic effect] …

VARIOUS ARTISTS: PANCAKE MOUNTAIN
(MONKEYBOY STUDIOS)
✪✪✪
Fugazi's jumpsuit-clad curmudgeon Ian MacKaye singing about "vowel movements," plus live performances featuring hyperactive toddlers bouncing around onstage with members of the Arcade Fire, make this kids' show must-see viewing for discriminating child-rearing hipsters and their too-cool-for-*Teletubbies* tykes …

ALICE COOPER: GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN
(SHOUT! FACTORY)
✪✪✪
Classic live footage of horror-metal O.G. (original ghoul) Alice Cooper's 1973 Billion Dollar Babies Tour. Snarling versions of "I'm 18" and "School's Out" make the interstitial skits—Cooper dresses up as a lounge singer in heaven, then later mounts an elephant and rides it down "Animal Road"—nearly forgivable. *LAUREN HARRIS*

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Discovery Channel's Dinosaur Week just got interesting.

B-A-N-A-N-A-S!

SMASH DINOS AND SNAG THE GIRL IN THIS MONSTROUS MOVIE TIE-IN BY LIBE GOAD

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

UBISOFT, 360, PS2, GC, XBOX, PC, PSP, GBA, GBDS

✪✪✪

THAT CLASSIC ROMANTIC triangle of a man, a monkey and the woman who loves them both is about to see its latest screen incarnation, as *Lord of the Rings* auteur Peter Jackson trades giant CGI creatures and short hairy heroes for, well, a big computer-generated ape and Jack Black. Big stretch.

Rather than forcing players to identify with either Kong or Adrien Brody's character Jack Driscoll, this game switches between both points of view, serving up first-person action from the human perspective and third-person gorilla beat-downs. Heroic leading man Driscoll must keep the rest of his film crew alive as the local flora and fauna attempt to snack on them. The game design is immersive, without the conventional life meter or ammo bar—real-world visual cues like blurred vision are the only clue that a grim death is close at hand.

The Kong levels feature the great ape swinging from trees and fighting supersized jungle critters. Sure, he's just doing it to impress his date, but the Kong vs. dinosaur battles on the monster-laden Skull Island are suitably violent. And when anyone or anything menaces Kong's loud-mouthed squeeze, Naomi Watts, it's a clear case of monkey see, monkey smash.

GIZMO OF THE MONTH

THE NIFTY NEW **XBOX 360** WILL HAVE PEOPLE THROWING ELBOWS IN THE AISLES OF TOYS 'R' US THIS SEASON

Even with Sony's PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Revolution around the corner, the Xbox 360 is must-have gear, thanks to its catalogue of exclusive games (*Perfect Dark Zero*, next year's *Halo 3*) and extras like the huge Xbox *Live* online service and Microsoft Media Center connectivity that allows you to stream music and movies from your computer.

While the graphics on this rival high-end gaming PCs, and the sleek white iPodesque design looks like something outta *Sleeper*, being the first on your block to own one won't come cheap: The fully loaded $399 package includes everything gamers need, including high-def cables, a wireless controller and a headset. Because chicks dig the headset.

Kiss your GPA—and your relationship—goodbye.

MICROSOFT XBOX 360

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

SEGA, 360

✪✪✪✪

Part *Silence of the Lambs*, part *Half-Life*, this first-person action game revolves around a serial-killer-hunting FBI agent framed for murder (oh, the irony). While the game contains mystery enough to stump a dozen Clarice Starlings and players can analyze evidence with forensic tools, the real emphasis is on the action. Armed with only one weapon at a time, our jacked-up G-man has to choose carefully—a metal pipe to the face or a shotgun blast in the gut? Decisions, decisions.

CALL OF DUTY 2

ACTIVISION, 360, PC

✪✪✪

Old soldiers never die—they just keep popping out sequels to more war-themed videogames. In this case, re-enlist with the Greatest Generation in the next chapter of the critically hailed first-person shooter. Armchair soldiers trek through several campaigns of vintage WWII action, but this time you can roam freely through the large environments and count on smarter squad mates who can actually get your back in a firefight.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

UBISOFT, PS2, XBOX, GC, PC

✪✪✪

Being royalty ain't what it's cracked up to be. The poor Prince (of Persia) gets in more trouble than Prince Harry at a kegger. The third installation in the series keeps the puzzle-solving and platform-jumping action of the previous entries and adds

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FacetoFace

intel

Meet the Gamers with the most game

See what's inside the best players of the CyberAthlete Professional World Tour

• Mikey So - method

Counter-strike Player

- Age: 21
- Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game EVER: Zelda Sagas
Most consecutive hours of Play: 15
Gaming Goals? My goal in gaming right now is to win every international event at least once because I have two under my belt right now, so just two more to go,

• Griffin Benger - shaGuar

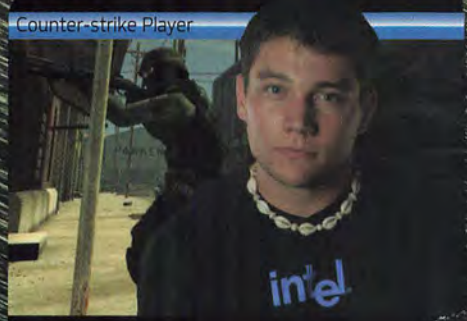
Counter-strike Player

- Age: 20
- Hometown: Toronto, Ontario
- On Tour: 4.5 years
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game Ever: Counter-Strike
Accolade: Won the World E Sports Games in Korea
Superstitious?: I have a stuffed Jaguar on the top of my monitor, I call him Shaguar the Jaguar, that's my good luck charm.

• Josh Seivers - Dominator

Counter-strike Player



- Age: 20
- Home State: Iowa
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game Ever: Counter-Strike
Back up Plan: Business Management Major at ISU
Superstitious?: We have different rituals, but I think it's part of the ritual for me not to tell you exactly what it is.

• Ronald Kim - Rambo

Counter-strike Player

- Age: 21
- Hometown: Dallas, TX
- On tour: 6 Years
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game Ever: Counter-strike
Starting Grounds: I was at my friends house and hopped on his computer and played it, ever since then I've been playing. I used to spend a lot of time in arcades when I was a kid.

• Sal Gerozzo - Volcano

Counter-strike Player

- Age: 19
- Hometown: New York
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game Ever: Counter-Strike
Winner!: Won the World Cyber Games in 2004
Superstitious?: I always wash my hands before I play, every single time.

• Kyle Miller - Ksharp

Counter-strike Player

- Age: 21
- Hometown: Washington DC
- On Tour: 6 Years
- Team: Team 3D

Favorite Game Ever: Zelda
Gamer Life Rocks!: I love it. I get to travel around the world with my best friends, and represent the USA overseas
Superstitious?: Personally I don't. I always just go with the flow, hope for the best and believe we can win.

Counter-Strike images courtesy of Valve.
Player Photos by: Nick Bosco

Advertisement

Sander Kaasjager - VoO

Painkiller image courtesy of DreamCatcher Interactive Inc.

PainKiller Player

- Age: 20
- Home Country: Holland
- How long on tour: 7 years
- Largest amount ever won: $50,000
- Team: Team Fnatic
- Favorite all-time game?: Quake 2

Q: What's so cool about gaming?
One of the things I found amazing was how big gaming is in Asia. I've been on TV and in newspapers out there. Of course I don't agree with gaming being something for geeks, that's just not true.

Q: Superstitious?
I always go to the washroom and wash my hands.

Q: What do you see in the future of gaming?
I think it could get big if people accept it for what it is, in Asia it's pretty big compared to what it is in Europe. If it's big in Asia why can't it be big here? I guess you can't expect things to take off in a second, look at Golf? and Poker?

Q: How long do tournaments take place for?
They take 3-4 days, the fi rst few rounds take place on the fi rst day. On the fi nal day there's a huge stage and lots of media coverage along with a large crowd. I lost in one of the early rounds once so that day I played for three or so hours and I usually play a maximum of two hours.

ARE YOU A BIG CYBERFISH IN A SMALL POND?

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The 2005 CPL World Tour is the first year-long competitive tour with stops in nine countries across four continents and boasts the largest competitive purse in gaming history. The winners and top three runners-up of each contest during the tour advance to compete in the $500,000 Grand Final.

Catch Blender and all the cyberathletes at the CPL World Championships in New York City Novermber 22nd. Find out who's the best in the world!

For more information log on to:
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Thrice: game enthusiasts, amateur park rangers.

GEEK FILES

AFTER THE COKE AND WHORES, VIDEOGAMES ARE MUST-HAVES FOR ANY SELF-RESPECTING MUSICIAN. THIS MONTH, **RILEY BRECKENRIDGE,** DRUMMER FOR SOCAL PROG-PUNKERS THRICE, EXPOSES HIS BAND'S DWEEBY SIDE

LAST GOOD GAME PLAYED
Tiger Woods '06. I used to work in a golf shop before we started touring, so this game is the closest I can get.

WHAT BAND KICKS THRICE'S ASS, GAMING-WISE?
On the last Warped Tour, I got into some heated matches of *MVP 2005* with My Chemical Romance's guitar tech.

POST-SHOW PASTIME: GAMES OR GROUPIES?
We're not much of a groupie band. Games aren't gonna give you herpes.

MOST CONSECUTIVE HOURS SPENT PLAYING
I probably played 20 games of *MVP 2005* in a row on a break from working on the new record. I woke up at 10 A.M., picked up the controller, and put it down at 10 P.M. Pretty pathetic, now that I think about it.

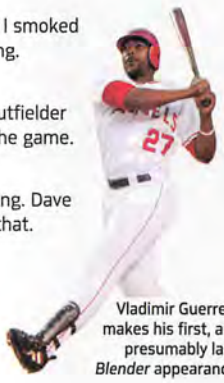
BEST FREE SCHWAG
Thrice played some online games against some fans and we ended up scoring some Xboxes. We just covered some Minor Threat songs for the new Tony Hawk game, so I'm hoping they'll come through with some free copies any day now.

GAMING DRUG OF CHOICE
I'll sit down with a beer or two … or seven. If I smoked pot, I'd sit there and trip out instead of playing.

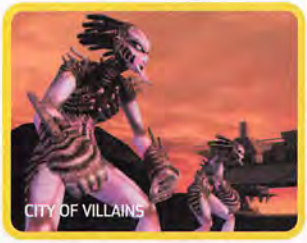
GAME CHARACTER I'D LIKE TO BE
Vladimir Guerrero from *MVP 2005*. He's an outfielder for the Angels and he's ridiculously good in the game.

A THRICE GAME WOULD BE LIKE …
It would be a game of us sitting around reading. Dave Eggers, C.S. Lewis or Mary Shelley, stuff like that.

BAND'S GEEKINESS SCALE, FROM 1 TO 10
Whoa. 9.8. We're high up there.
GABE SORIA


Vladimir Guerrero makes his first, and presumably last, *Blender* appearance.

THRICE'S NEW ALBUM, *VHEISSU (ISLAND)*, IS OUT NOW.



EYETOY: KINETIC

SCEA, PS2

✪✪✪

Busting a few end-zone dance moves while playing *Madden* is no substitute for actual exercise. For those who can't bear the thought of actually going outside to (horror!) a gym, *EyeToy: Kinetic* uses a webcam to create a personalized fitness regimen covering everything from martial arts to aerobics routines while your ugly mug is projected on the screen—it's like starring in your own tae bo video.

ELDER SCROLLS 4: OBLIVION

2K GAMES, 360, PC

✪✪✪✪✪

The fourth game in the long-running role-playing series presents a truly much-needed variety to the combat. In a new twist, the bipolar Prince regularly gives in to his dark side and transforms into a spiked-chain-wielding monster.

open-ended sword-and-sorcery world with hundreds of computer-controlled inhabitants over dozens of square miles. Go anywhere, do anything, talk to anyone—or just kill them. *Oblivion*'s unique world ultimately pulls off one of the hardest tricks in gaming—getting people capable of human interaction interested in a role-playing game.

CITY OF VILLAINS

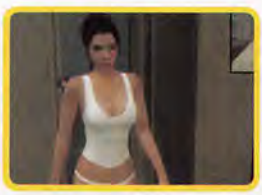
NC SOFT, PC

✪✪✪

While professional wrestlers and third-world dictators can move pretty easily between good and evil as the mood strikes them, spandex-clad superheroes have a harder time dabbling in the dark side. *City of Villains* flips the conventions of the online multiplayer game *City of Heroes*—instead of fighting crime alongside other players from around the globe, everyone is evil. Starting with a daring prison breakout, team up with other super-villains and generally bring down property values for the beleaguered citizenry.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



INDIGO PROPHECY

ATARI, PC, PS2, XBOX

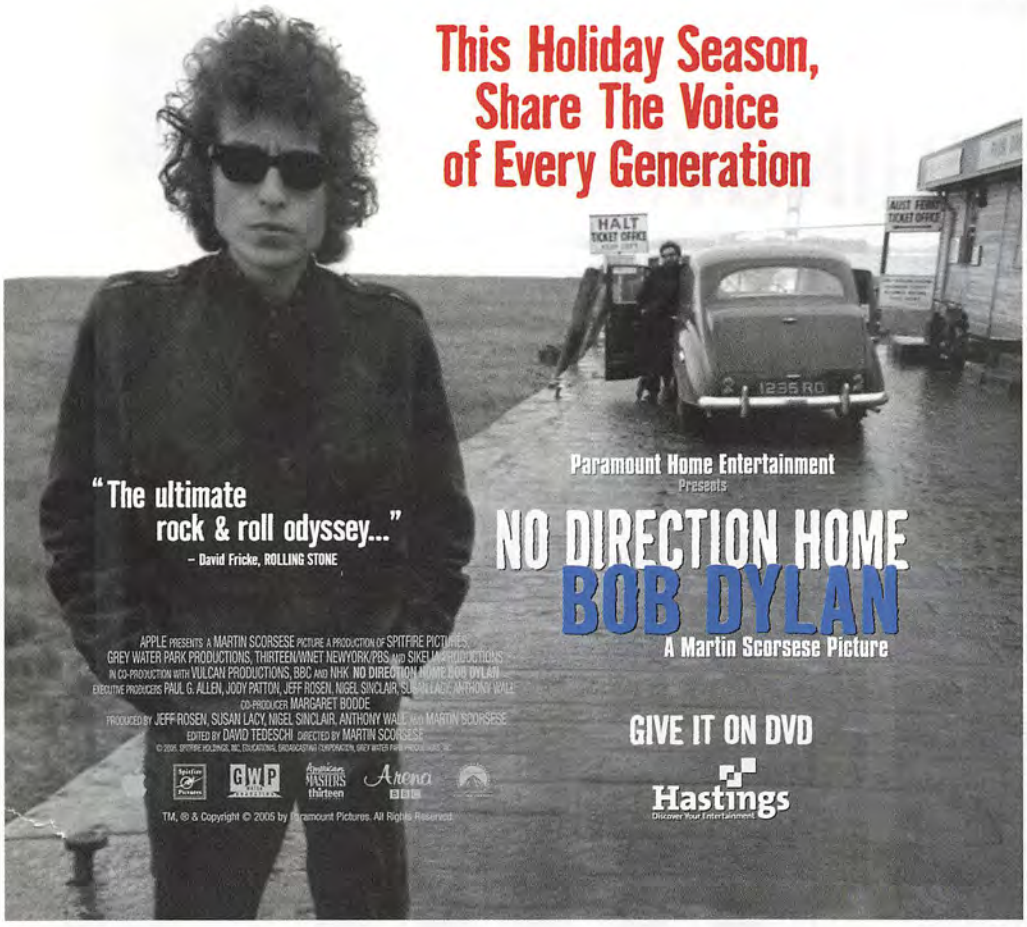
Ever wake up in a dirty bathroom with a bloody knife and a dead body? Yeah—us too.

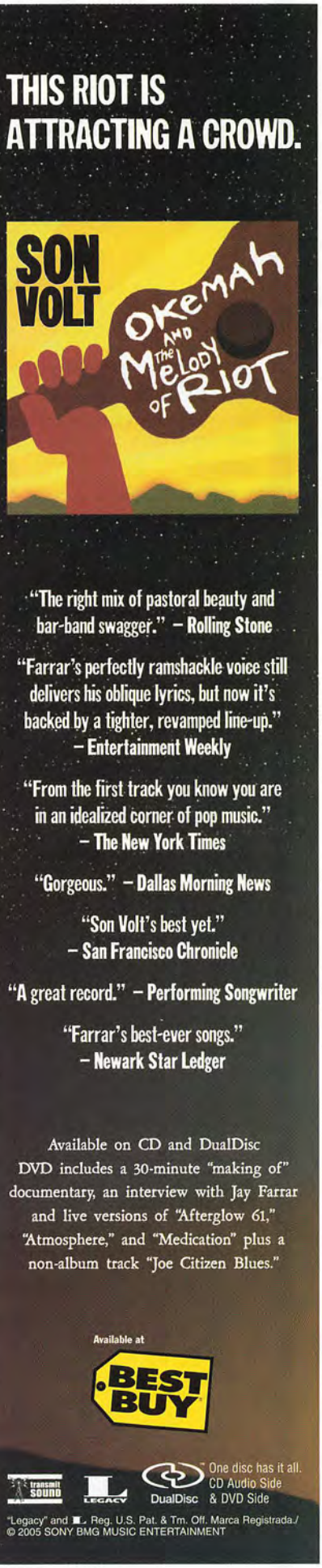
SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE

EA GAMES, PC

Send the Sims to the club, where they're gonna party like it's all of their birthdays.

THRICE: MYRIAM SANTOS-KAYDA; GUERRERO: KIRBY LEE/WIREIMAGE.COM

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SON VOLT
OKEMAH AND THE MELODY OF RIOT
"The right mix of pastoral beauty and bar-band swagger." – Rolling Stone
"Farrar's perfectly ramshackle voice still delivers his oblique lyrics, but now it's backed by a tighter, revamped line-up." – Entertainment Weekly
"From the first track you know you are in an idealized corner of pop music." – The New York Times
"Gorgeous." – Dallas Morning News
"Son Volt's best yet." – San Francisco Chronicle
"A great record." – Performing Songwriter
"Farrar's best-ever songs." – Newark Star Ledger
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PENCIL ME IN

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 6 down!

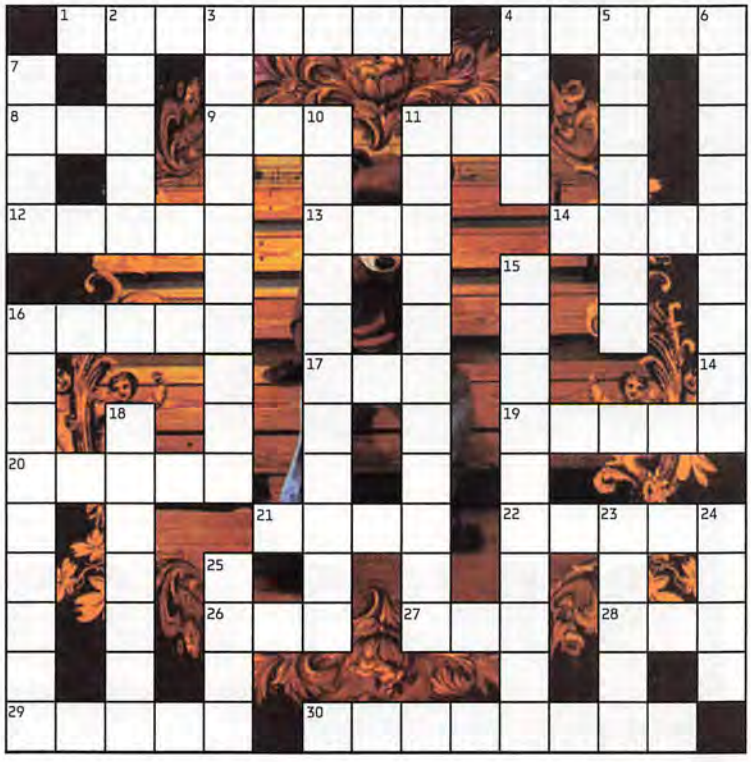
BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 Your favorite song on your phone, perhaps
4 Comic in Tenacious D
8 Synth rockers ___ N to (X)
9 Kind of hipster soundsystem
11 "Wild Thing" rapper Tone ___
12 The A in VMA
13 "Roundabout" classic prog outfit
14 27 across's day job, for short
16 R & B crooner Mack
17 Repeated word that finishes this AC/DC title: "___ Made ___"
19 The Stones wanted to spend one together
20 Alice in Chains sang about an angry one in '92
21 Madonna sang about a lucky one in '83
22 Mike who is still tipping
26 Sean Lennon's middle name
27 Rock star on reality show *Tommy* ___ *Goes to College*
28 They were straight outta Compton
29 A modern-day Sir John
30 Recently paroled G-Unit rapper (two words)

DOWN

2 Where the Beatles met the Maharishi
3 2005 No. 1 hit by 6 down and Jamie Foxx (two words)
4 *Idol* runner-up Bo
5 Brit buzz band with the album "Bang Bang Rock & Roll" (two words)
6 Rapper who bashed Bush during the Katrina benefits
7 Tegan's sister
10 Franz Ferdinand's 2005 come-on (four words)
11 Missy Elliott/Fat Man Scoop/Ciara hit (two words)
15 Atlanta rapper who runs Thug Motivation seminars (two words)
16 Boston quintet who want just the girl (two words)
18 Avant folkie Devendra
23 A singing Sinatra
24 Classic Memphis Soul record label
25 Rap-metal act whose original name was LAPD



→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018

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2. Paid in-county subscriptions stated on Form 3541	0	0
3. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution	88,766	90,433
4. Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
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3. Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
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G. Total distribution	716,925	814,883
H. Copies not distributed	256,635	250,759
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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) James J. Buckley, Circulation Business Director

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BY VICTORIA DE SILVERIO
PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREEM BLACK

WHO DOES RICKY MARTIN THINK HE IS?

WHY DID YOU DRAW AN ANGEL FOR YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT?
Ha! It's not an angel, but thank you for saying so.

SO YOU'RE NOT AN ANGEL?
Well, I was thinking more about how I feel like I don't have a lot of time, so I have to fly!

BESIDES ALWAYS BEING IN A HURRY, WHAT WOULD AN EX SAY ABOUT YOU?
That I'm the love of their life! I'm the best man that they've ever had, a gentleman who treated them like a lady.

HAS ANYONE SAID THAT ABOUT YOU?
No, but do you think I'm going to say the opposite?

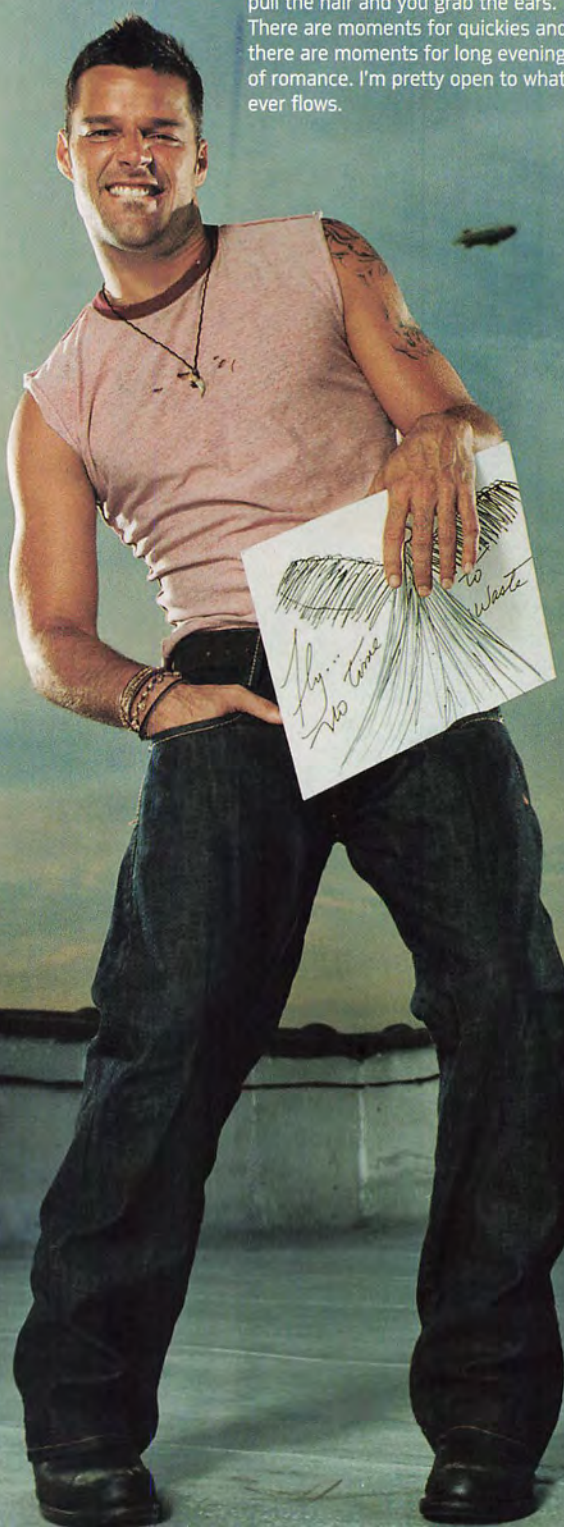
WHAT DO PEOPLE FIND ANNOYING ABOUT YOU?
Not caring sometimes. Let's put it this way: In the past, everything was about how accepted I was, but after a while, it became too painful. It was insanity. Cuckoo! People also get annoyed that I'm always on the computer.

UP LATE GOOGLING YOURSELF?
I've done that. There are a lot of pages with information about me that I didn't even know about, like that I got a face-lift! And a nose job! And a chin job! I don't have a problem with plastic surgery. I think eventually I will go there. But today, I'm not thinking about it.

WHEN WAS YOUR LAST BOOTY CALL?
Three nights ago. Before I got on a plane in Miami.

HOW ABOUT YOUR LAST ONE-NIGHT STAND?
The other night. We met, we did it, we left. I don't know if we are going to meet again.

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR TASTE IN SEX?
I'm open to everything. There are moments for soft, gentle sex. And there are moments for a good spank in the butt, the kind of sex where you pull the hair and you grab the ears. There are moments for quickies and there are moments for long evenings of romance. I'm pretty open to whatever flows.



DESCRIBE THE LAST PORN MOVIE YOU WATCHED.
Uh, do you really want me to go there? [*Blender*: Yes.] Uh, OK, golden showers. I love giving the golden shower. I've done it before in the shower. It's like so sexy, you know, the temperature of your body and the shower water is very different.

EVER VIDEOTAPED YOURSELF HAVING SEX?
I have, but I always delete it. So like if we wanted to film again, we would do it, watch it, get turned on again [*grabs crotch*], do it again, but before going to sleep, we would delete it because I don't want to be Pamela Anderson! If I am having sex on camera, they better pay me!

HOW MUCH?
Twenty million. Tax free.

WHAT DO YOUR PARENTS HAVE THAT YOU DON'T?
I was going to say patience, but I think I have that. One thing, though: My father has an airplane and I don't. It's a turbo prop to go island-hopping in the Caribbean. I'm an airplane freak, but I'm waiting to get a G4.

WHO WOULD MAKE YOU LOSE YOUR COOL?
I lost my cool when I met the Dalai Lama. He is amazing, a child inside. I showed him around Puerto Rico, and we discussed politics, music, our foundations.

DID THE DALAI LAMA KNOW YOUR MUSIC?
Well, as I was talking to him, one of the people who came with him said, "Ohhhh, Ricky Martin! *Ale ale ale*, go go go!" It was surreal.

FINAL QUESTION: ARE YOU A GENIUS?
All I know is that I know nothing. [BLENDER]

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College: ☐ Attending (13) ☐ Graduate (16)

Year of Graduation:_____

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